United Nations A/S-25/PV.5

General Assembly

Twenty-fifth special session

Official Records

5th meeting
Friday, 8 June 2001, 9 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Harri Holkeri ..... (Finland)

The meeting was called to order at 9 a.m.

Agenda item 3 (*continued*)

Credentials of representatives to the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly

Report of the Credentials Committee (A/S-25/6)

The President: We shall proceed to consider the draft resolution recommended by the Credentials Committee in paragraph 15 of its report.

The Assembly shall now take action on the recommendation of the Credentials Committee set forth in paragraph 15 of its report.

The Credentials Committee adopted this draft resolution without a vote. May I take it that the Assembly wishes to do the same? It is so decided.

The draft resolution was adopted (resolution S-25/1).

The President: We have thus concluded our consideration of agenda item 3.

Agenda items 8, 9 and 10 (*continued*)

Review and appraisal of progress made in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda

Further actions and initiatives for overcoming obstacles to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda

Declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency the Honourable Seymour Mullings, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Land and Environment of Jamaica.

Mr. Mullings (Jamaica): Mr. President, I wish to first join other delegations in congratulating you on your leadership of this special session of the United Nations General Assembly that is dedicated to a review and appraisal of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

We meet to assess our stewardship in furthering the commitments that we made in Istanbul and to examine afresh the strategies and mechanisms that will assure greater opportunity for all our peoples in the urban civilization of the future.

This meeting marks almost 25 years since Habitat I. We, the international community, particularly the developing countries, continue to seek solutions to the major issues identified in the Habitat Agenda, the most urgent being access to affordable land and shelter, as well as access to credit and appropriate technology. Several other interrelated issues have gained increasing importance, including urban governance, poverty eradication, urbanization, social integration and the

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support of disadvantaged groups, and local government.

Jamaica has utilized its National Habitat Committee and several of its ministries and agencies to plan and implement many aspects of the Habitat Agenda. We have also formulated and begun to implement a number of major policies and programmes aimed at achieving the goal of the sustainable development of human settlements. The National Land Policy, the National Housing Policy (which includes a joint venture policy for housing development), the National Industrial Policy and the Jamaican Environmental Action Programme represent key intervention areas in which the Government has taken action.

Prepared with the involvement of a broad cross-section of stakeholders, the policies have become the platform for enriched partnerships. They have brought together the resources and enterprise of the government and the private sector with the innovativeness of civil society, non-governmental organizations and community groups.

They deal with a variety of problems, including many problems identified in Habitat documents and programmes. We have learned from the best practices of other countries and have developed some of our own. We are also establishing new local government structures to assist with planning for sustainable development at the local level.

We have also fostered participation by non-governmental organizations and community groups in our planning and development activities. We have implemented several projects dealing with the reorganization of squatter-settled areas and the provision of land with secure tenure to many people. We have begun a major island wide cadastral mapping programme of some 800,000 parcels of land, and we hope to clarify and register over 350,000 of those parcels. We continue to implement mitigation measures to address costly natural and man-made disasters. We have also begun a major inner city and urban renewal programme.

Yet today our country is, like others, faced with the persistent problems of inadequate human, financial and technological resources. We continue to depend on grants and loans from developed countries and multilateral funding agencies. We in the developing world, however, need to make international donors and lenders understand that while problems can be generalized, cultural and other practices, norms and levels of education vary, and there are human faces to the issues.

The commitment and enabling role of transnational corporations must be encouraged so that they can become more involved in the solutions. Developing countries should also continue to strengthen their self-sufficiency and self-reliance in dealing with the issues, and draw more on the innovativeness, initiative and capacity of their own peoples.

The importance of a participatory approach to our development strategy must also be underscored. All citizens of our countries, including the youth, must be made to understand the problems that exist and the actions that must follow the decisions that we make at these meetings. If we do not involve all citizens in the search for solutions; if we do not commit to do whatever we can, however we can, even if it is incremental; if we do not become more self reliant; if we do not adopt a policy of more action and less talk, then at Habitat III we may be forced to acknowledge that we have progressed little beyond where we are today.

The decisions reached at Istanbul and those we will adopt today constitute a solid foundation for future progress, but they must be translated into concrete measures, into national policy, into new forms of international cooperation, if we are to achieve the worthy goals that we have set for ourselves. Let us therefore find the political will to meaningfully implement our agreed agendas and plans of action.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Miguel Cárdenas, Minister of Housing of Panama.

Mr. Cárdenas (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the Government of Panama and the Meeting of Ministers and High-level Authorities of the Housing and Urban Development Sector in Latin America and the Caribbean (MINURVI), I have the honour to take this rostrum to speak before the General Assembly at its twenty-fifth special session to review and appraise the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

Today, five years after the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, held in Istanbul, we take this opportunity to reiterate our commitment to continuing, fully and progressively, to implement its

Declaration and Habitat Agenda, which are and will continue to be the sources for the sustainable development of human settlements.

In accordance with these commitments, MINURVI met in Havana and Panama City at its eighth and ninth forums, respectively, and at the Latin America and Caribbean regional preparatory conference for this special session, in Santiago, Chile. At these meetings, policies, strategies and cooperation for the sustainable development of human settlements were developed, with the technical support of the regional Habitat office and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. We drafted the strategies for a regional plan of action, with the fundamental goal of making a qualitative assessment of the trends in policies adopted by various countries and the elements thereof. Among these elements, I would point to the achievement of equity and the eradication of urban poverty; urban development and the productivity of human settlements with a view to improving the quality of life; vulnerability to natural disasters; improving the environment; governance and participation; and the efficiency of policies and management.

Moreover, on behalf of the Governments and inhabitants of our countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, we ask that the Declaration of Santiago be included in the report on this special session as an explicit recognition of our updated regional plan of action.

We also feel that this is right moment to emphasize the fact that, in October in Caracas, Venezuela, the tenth anniversary of MINURVI will be celebrated. The central theme of that celebration will be assessments of, reflections on and the principal strategic guidelines for housing and human settlements in the coming years.

Statistics and indices demonstrate that the implementation of the Habitat Agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean has indeed allowed for significant progress to be made in providing adequate shelter to the poorest of our people, guaranteeing security of land tenure, reducing environmental degradation and addressing the needs of the most vulnerable sectors of our society.

Despite these results and the efforts of our Governments, there remain deep-rooted inequities arising from the effects of globalization and age-old social deficiencies that we will have to consider in due course. In the context of the issue under discussion, the Government of Panama has worked to implement policies and programmes to guarantee financing for social housing with a view to ensuring that, with the resolute participation of the private sector, the current housing shortage can be gradually reduced.

At the same time, activities are under way to establish the conditions necessary to ensure that shelter is available in a sustainable, pleasant and safe urban environment and that financial instruments are accessible to the people most affected by the housing shortage. Similarly, we are revitalizing the "Lotes Servidos" programme to provide access to appropriate financing to allow families to build their own homes and to live in dignity, as well as a programme for the loan of building materials. All of this falls within the context of a national urban development strategy that serves to guide our housing programmes and urban transportation projects.

In conclusion, at this twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, I express my sincere wish that this will be a fruitful session of discussions under inspired leadership. We are convinced that it will provide us with an opportunity to exchange ideas and experiences, allowing us to contribute to and renew our commitment to making tangible progress for the benefit of humankind.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Jaime Ravinet, Minister of Housing, Urban Development and National Heritage of Chile.

Mr. Ravinet (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): I am here as the representative of my country, Chile, leading a delegation comprised of slum dwellers, community leaders, parliamentarians, mayors, academics, business people and Government officials. I represent a nation that, for many years, has come together in an effort to create better living conditions for our neediest sectors.

Chile is a small country of 15 million inhabitants, with just over 4 million dwellings, of which nearly 1 million have been constructed during the past decade. We can say with pride that we are reducing the housing deficit in Chile and that providing housing for the neediest sectors has been a priority of all our Governments over the past 50 years. Today, we are

closer to achieving the goal of ensuring that each Chilean family has its decent housing.

How have we done this? In Chile, it has been demonstrated that the key to improving the quality of life in our human settlements is the implementation of effective public policies, such as those aimed at sustained economic growth, fiscal balances and a steady increase in public social investment in sanitation, housing and neighbourhoods.

Ongoing cooperation between the public and private sectors is an essential requirement for steady progress towards overcoming the quantitative and qualitative deficits in housing. We have established a policy of public infrastructure concessions — roads and inter-urban routes, ports and health infrastructure — that has led to a threefold increase in the level of traditional investment, with reasonable rates of return and a strong regulatory framework. This concession-based approach is now also being extended to land and tax areas with tourism potential and to the construction of prison establishments. Clear rules have been established governing applications for access to housing characterized by transparent procedures, regular savings by each applicant family, the organization of applicants and payment of the obligations and loans contracted by beneficiaries. Citizens have been organized and have contributed significantly to the progress that has been made. Public institutions have been improved at the regional and municipal levels.

All these principles have been at the heart of our policies and programmes and have yielded demonstrably efficient and effective results at times of varying economic performance, as has been the case in the second half of the period 1997-2001, when the international crisis has forced us to exercise even greater discipline in our investments and public expenditures. In short, the principles of increased production, cooperation between the public and private sectors, transparency, the organization of citizens and the modernization of institutions are just as or more valid in times of economic downturn.

A great deal remains to be done, however. Our country still has many unmet needs, as a result of which many of our compatriots live in extremely marginal conditions. I would like on this occasion to share our challenges, which are surely also the challenges facing many of the countries represented here today.

In Chile, we succeeded in the 1990s in significantly reducing the number of people living in poverty — from 40 per cent to 20 per cent of the population — as a result of the doubling of our national product and of proactive and innovative social policies. As a result of the marked increase in life expectancy, smaller families and increased expectations, new problems are emerging in the areas of housing and habitat. We have therefore been forced to adapt the Government's response to these circumstances. It is no longer possible to think only of overcoming the housing deficit; we need also to adopt an integral approach to the problem by devising programmes to benefit the most disadvantaged sectors.

We are therefore committed to overcoming the difficult situation faced by Chilean families that still lack access to safe and decent housing. The challenge facing the country is to be able to meet the housing shortage over the next 10 years. It is a very bold and ambitious goal. We have pledged to build every year 25,000 basic houses — all with the capacity to be extended — for our neediest sectors by encouraging savings and providing a state subsidy that removes the need to obtain a mortgage. Under the programme "Chile Barrio", 100,000 families currently living in squatter settlements and slums will be relocated by the year 2005 and 30,000 more by the year 2007. Together, these two programmes will provide housing for the 300,000 poorest families in Chile by the year 2007.

The challenge, however, is not merely to build housing; it is to build cities. Today, 85 per cent of our population reside in urban areas. The horizontal sprawl of cities is a widespread phenomenon in Latin America and practically throughout the world. We are therefore promoting a development policy to identify and rebuild central districts and zones, to restore older housing and to create programmes relating to urban density that will allow our cities to grow.

Some tasks remain unachieved, however. We believe that it is necessary to modernize our institutions in order to enhance the efficiency of urban governance. We need to develop new information systems and planning methodologies. We need to redirect the allocation of public expenditures and revise property tax systems. We believe that cities cannot develop without sustainable environmental

development. Most important, cities cannot exist without cooperation between Government, the public sector at all levels, in particular the private sector and social entities.

Throughout our recent history, we have striven to develop and maintain mutual trust. Our intention is to continue this approach, which has proven to be an effective one. Experience has shown us that ongoing cooperation between the public and private sectors and between Government and the opposition has been a key condition for steady progress towards overcoming the quantitative and qualitative deficits in housing and essential services. Faced with the challenge of meeting the need for housing of a large number of persons, it is essential to establish and strengthen our ties of cooperation with the international community.

"Exchanging experiences", "developing technologies" and "building the future" are phrases that should resonate through and guide our efforts. Today, in this global forum, I wish on behalf of my country to assure members once again of our cooperation and to urge everyone to embark upon the task of building once and for all a more liveable world in which all of us can grow and develop.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Alfred Bobson Sesay, Minister of Lands, Housing, Country Planning and the Environment of Sierra Leone.

Mr. Sesay (Sierra Leone): Let me first of all extend the warm felicitations of His Excellency the President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, as well as those of the people of Sierra Leone. Let me assure the General Assembly that the President of Sierra Leone, with the support of all Sierra Leoneans, is prepared to implement the provisions of the Habitat Agenda and the decisions of this Assembly.

The resolve of Sierra Leoneans to support their President to ensure the successful implementation of the decisions of this session is not just a cosmetic one. It will be recalled that, in 1997, Sierra Leoneans stoutly resisted junta rule in favour of democracy. Today, we are more than ever ready to defend our hard-won democracy, especially with peace and stability in sight.

At this point, the President and the people of Sierra Leone wish me to convey their profound gratitude to the family of the United Nations for its unflinching support to the people of Sierra Leone during the 10 years of brutal war. As a result of this continuous and sustained support, the war is almost at an end and, for once, the people of Sierra Leone will begin to enjoy peace.

I need not belabour the fact that Sierra Leone has gone through a senseless and brutal war, during which the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels perpetrated unimaginable atrocities against innocent Sierra Leoneans, some of whom were killed, maimed or sexually abused or had limbs amputated. In January 1999, the RUF and the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council invaded Freetown, causing mass destruction of public and residential houses in the city and suburban areas. In fact, figures obtained from the registration of burnt-out houses, conducted by my Ministry, indicated that 5,932 houses were completely destroyed in the city and its environs.

There is no accurate record of the total damage inflicted on human settlements nationwide. However, various assessments indicate that as of now approximately 300,000 houses have been destroyed nationwide. In addition, 1,700 educational facilities, 400 health posts and 300 water wells have all been destroyed. Out of the total population of 4.5 million, the war uprooted approximately 1.2 million people, who became either internally displaced persons or refugees in neighbouring countries. In addition, approximately one thousand people of all ages had limbs amputated.

From this scenario it can be deduced that the Government has an enormous task to meet a huge backlog of housing needs estimated at 300,000. There is also the problem of re-planning the 30,000 human settlements that were destroyed during the war. Koidu, formerly the second largest city in Sierra Leone, has been destroyed to its foundations.

The task of reconstructing, rehabilitating and resettling this war-ravaged country is daunting. In 1996, the Government made institutional changes to address this situation. It transformed the National Reconstruction Committee into the National Commission for Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Resettlement, and created the Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR) Programme. The former is responsible for the coordination of relief related to the construction, rehabilitation and resettlement activities by ministries and non-governmental organizations. The DDR Programme

oversees demobilizing, disarming and reintegrating ex-combatants into society.

The Government has also carried out regulatory reform. The Town and Country Planning Act has been amended to allow the declaration of the whole country as a planning area. To ensure effective environmental management, an environmental protection act has also been passed into law.

My Government has revised the National Housing Policy, which was approved in 1996, to reflect recent trends in the shelter sector. The central goal of the National Housing Policy is to achieve a maximum addition to the housing stock of the nation, and to enable every citizen to have access to safe, healthy, decent and affordable housing.

The revised National Housing Policy redefines the role of Government as facilitator and enabler. This means that the Government's role will be to create a conducive environment for fully mobilizing the potential resources of the public, private and community sectors in the housing delivery process.

Considering the recent and future financial situation of the Government, and the sheer magnitude of the task, it is obvious that the Government alone does not have the capacity to intervene in planning for the war-affected areas and to deliver adequate shelter for internally displaced persons. Given these circumstances, the Government believes that the only way out of this situation is to create an enabling environment for the private sector, communities, and bilateral and multilateral donors to fully and effectively participate in planning for the war-affected areas and in delivering adequate and affordable shelter for the internally displaced persons.

To this end, the Government has therefore decided to create the enabling environment that will facilitate easy access to land and to durable but affordable building materials. One of the strategies to achieve this objective is the provision of adequate amounts of land with services at affordable prices and at suitable locations through the establishment of land banks in urban and provincial centres.

Our Government, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Centre for Human Settlement (Habitat) and the Government Fund for Technical Assistance, has popularized the use of local building materials throughout the country. In each of the 149 chiefdoms in the country, our Government has trained at least four trainers for each chiefdom, 40 per cent of whom are women. These people have been encouraged to form cooperatives in the provision of shelter.

To ensure the full participation of war-affected communities in planning the reconstruction of their ravaged settlements and shelters, our Government has decentralized most of its functions to local government institutions, including district councils and town councils. My Ministry has also decentralized from its headquarters to regional planning offices. These regional planning offices have the power and authority to carry out functions of surveying, environmental management and physical planning in their areas of jurisdiction. To facilitate country-wide physical planning, the Ministry will consult with local authorities and other stakeholders on the need to declare the whole country as a planning area. Thereafter town planning committees will be set up in the newly declared town planning areas.

Our achievements over the past years have been modest due to the intensification of the war, which engulfed the entire country by 1999. The rebel war not only destroyed the physical fabric of the country but also its socio-economic infrastructure. The war has almost come to an end. Currently disarmament and demobilization of combatants are progressing satisfactorily under the guidance of the United Nations Mission to Sierra Leone. With peace in sight, I wish to inform this Assembly that my Government will continue to implement its plan of action included in the last country report. As and when the economy improves, new programmes will be developed and implemented.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency the Honourable Garba Madaki Ali, Minister of State for Works and Housing of Nigeria.

Mr. Madaki Ali (Nigeria): On behalf of the Nigerian delegation, I wish to congratulate you and the Bureau on your election to guide the proceedings of this special session.

We also wish to commend the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, and the Executive Director of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), Dr. Anna K. Tibaijuka, for the able manner in which this special session has been successfully convened. I unreservedly assure you

of the cooperation and support of my delegation in the conduct of this session.

My delegation recognizes and appreciates the fact that this special session is the result of joint collaboration with a range of international institutions working tirelessly to ensure that this session could be held to discuss very important human settlement issues that affect humanity. As you may probably recall, our collective search and desire for better living conditions for all peoples of the world is a journey that started in Vancouver, Canada, twenty-five years ago, and was continued by the Habitat II conference held in 1996 in Istanbul, Turkey. The Habitat Agenda that was adopted by over 171 governments, including Nigeria, provided a roadmap for resolving the problems of a quickly urbanizing world, setting out approaches and strategies towards the achievement of sustainable development of the world's urban areas.

Five years after the Habitat II conference was held in Istanbul it is indeed very appropriate for Member States to meet once again to evaluate the progress made in the implementation of the recommendations and strategies adopted at that conference to guide the development of our human settlements. This special session is, therefore, an apt occasion for us to see whether the vision of the Habitat Agenda has been realized, as well as how much work has been done — and still needs to be done — in making the cities of the third millennium liveable and sustainable.

We must therefore remind ourselves now and again of our responsibility to ensure that our children and wards inherit cities that are safe, have all basic facilities and are free of fear.

The dawn of the twenty-first century found Nigeria with an estimated urban population rate of more than 40 per cent, coupled with a very high urban growth rate, which is expected to raise the urban population rate to about 65 per cent by the year 2025. The implications of such rapid urban growth are often manifested in increased poverty, environmental degradation, traffic congestion, overcrowded housing, crime and homelessness. In addition, Africa as a continent is still categorized as the least urbanized, because only 35 per cent of its people live in urban areas. However, with an urbanization rate of 5 per cent annually, the continent has recorded the fastest urban growth rate in human history. It is estimated that by the year 2020, 52 per cent of the continent's population will be living in cities.

Since Istanbul, Nigeria has made serious efforts to achieve the objectives of the Habitat Agenda. In its latest initiative to promote effective and responsive human settlements management, the Government of Nigeria, in collaboration with the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, in April this year launched in Abuja the Global Campaign on Urban Governance. The Campaign, in the main, underscored to the people of Nigeria and, indeed, of Africa, our will and commitment to democracy and the entrenchment of the principles and ideals of accountable governance.

The greatest challenge to sustainable human settlements development between now and 2015 is how to provide adequate shelter for all in the face of a world population that will increasingly reside in cities. This challenge was the subject of the workshop held at Abuja in tandem with the launching of the Global Campaign on Urban Governance. The workshop highlighted emerging issues in human settlements that cannot be ignored if meaningful progress is to be made. Those issues include urban security and safety, partnership, advocacy, participation, transparency and accountability, the empowerment of youth, women and the urban poor in urban governance, decentralization, poverty eradication and capacity-building for local governments and civil society organizations.

It is therefore crucial that a favourable external environment supportive of developing countries' programmes to implement the Habitat Agenda on human settlements be put in place. In this regard, urgent action should be taken by the developed countries that have not yet done so to achieve the internationally agreed target of official development assistance. It is also important that the international community should address the critical issue of the debt burden facing developing countries, in order to make more resources available for the implementation of human settlement programmes in their respective countries. Equally important is the need to improve the finances of, and strengthen, the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements so as to enable it to perform its functions effectively.

In conclusion, the emergence of inclusive cities, as they are currently contemplated, will depend to a great extent on the outcome of consultations and negotiations such as we have embarked on during this

special session, particularly as we consider the draft declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium. My delegation is looking forward to constructive and fruitful deliberations in the course of this session. We are hopeful that the deliberations of this session will provide additional impetus to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda for the benefit of humanity.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Dragoslav Šumarac, Minister of Urban Planning and Construction of Yugoslavia.

Mr. Šumarac (Yugoslavia): The Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia pays particular attention to the issues related to human settlements and Habitat activities. We uphold all the decisions of the Istanbul Conference, and we are striving to implement them. We underscore the importance of a structured and comprehensive approach to human settlements problems in all parts of the world. Those problems are inextricably linked to respect for human rights and directly affect economic and social safety, peace and security. Unfortunately, no sufficient efforts have been made up to now to translate the results of the Istanbul Conference into practice, especially as regards the situation in the least developed countries. We are convinced that this special session will contribute to a better understanding of those problems.

Yugoslavia, as a European country in transition, is facing problems similar to those faced by other Central and Eastern European countries. There can be no doubt that the transition from a centrally planned to a market-oriented economy has brought about severe economic and social hardships affecting the population and human settlements. The situation in Yugoslavia in this regard is very serious because additional adverse factors have had an impact on it.

As the Assembly knows, due to Milosević's misguided politics, Yugoslavia has been isolated for a long time, and United Nations sanctions and other restrictions have been imposed on it, with devastating effects on the economic and social situation. The bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999 further aggravated the situation and has directly contributed to the destruction of human settlements and to environmental deterioration. As a result of the wars waged in the territories of the former Yugoslavia and the situation in Kosovo and Metohija, we now have the burden of more than 700,000 refugees and displaced persons from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Kosovo and Metohija, all living in inadequate accommodations. Immediate action is needed to offset these effects. My Government expects even greater involvement on the part of the international community, first and foremost through Habitat and the United Nations Environment Programme, but also through other programmes.

The situation in the southern Serbian province of Kosovo and Metohija, which has been administered by the United Nations since June 1999 in accordance with Security Council resolution 1244 (1999), is an added source of concern. Serbs and other non-Albanians had to leave their homes and properties in Kosovo and Metohija under pressure and find shelter elsewhere in Yugoslavia. Their dwellings and other property in Kosovo and Metohija have been seized and occupied unlawfully by ethnic Albanian tenants.

In order to resolve that difficult situation, it will be necessary for the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo, Habitat and other agencies present in Kosovo and Metohija to undertake effective measures, in cooperation with the authorities of Yugoslavia and of the Republic of Serbia and in compliance with resolution 1244 (1999). In particular, conditions should be created for all expelled and displaced persons to be able to return in safety and without hindrance, while at the same time the protection of all their property rights should be ensured.

Despite all these hardships, my Government is resolved to continue to build a democratic society based on the rule of law, respect for human rights and a greater role for non-governmental organizations. Work is under way on a series of laws dealing with local self-government and decentralization, with an emphasis on greater competencies for municipalities, especially in the field of housing and other issues related to human settlements. A long-term plan for proportional regional development is also a priority.

We hope that Habitat will increase its activities in Yugoslavia. For its part, my Government stands ready to support Habitat and to ensure that its activities are unimpeded. This will also contribute to protecting the property rights of internally displaced persons from Kosovo and Metohija and to linking Habitat activities to the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate my Government's determination to cooperate

constructively with the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements and with all other relevant organizations in the implementation of the Istanbul decisions. To that end, we support the proposed draft declaration on cities and other human settlements, which is to be adopted at the end of this session.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Kwamena Bartels, Minister of Works and Housing of Ghana.

Mr. Bartels (Ghana): Ghana is delighted to participate in this debate, and to share its views on the further implementation of the Habitat Agenda, agreed to in Istanbul in June 1996.

The right to adequate housing is such a fundamental part of the right of individuals to an adequate standard of living that Istanbul must stand along with the Cairo, Copenhagen, Rio and Beijing Summits as a milestone in our struggle to reaffirm and assure to each and every human being a life of dignity, security and social justice. The dreams and ambitions that drove the outcome of Habitat I represented the best of our values as a civilized community. There can be no doubt that there has been an increase in urban poverty, a worsening of the problems of human settlements in rural areas, as well as an upsurge in natural and human-made disasters since Istanbul. The estimated rate of increase in the urban population over the next 20 years alone constitutes an urgent call for action to address the huge need of planning to address issues of poverty, disease and sustainable development.

Water and waste management and maintenance of the ecology, particularly the preservation of our forests, are today approaching a state of crisis in many of our countries. Clearly, the Habitat Agenda is as relevant today as it was five years ago, if not more pressing, and we are pleased that the negotiations on the draft outcome successfully avoided the trap of debating the Agenda.

With the necessary political will, the objectives we are about to set ourselves are not overly ambitious. They are indeed doable. Mobilizing political will, particularly at the international level, will be absolutely critical. As the national reports have clearly demonstrated, the capacity of developing countries like mine to provide adequate shelter for citizens depends on a successful strategy of partnership and policy frameworks.

In the case of Ghana, our commitment to meeting our objectives of sustainable human settlements remains at the centre of our national planning objectives. Since its assumption of office barely six months ago, the new Government of Ghana has put in place a number of policies to assure an open and transparent Government, take the country out of its current economic difficulties and contribute to subregional peace, stability and socio-economic development with a view to expanding opportunity and fostering greater wealth creation.

We remain committed to the efforts that have been made in the past five years to improve access to housing and better living conditions in human settlements through direct investment and by facilitating and promoting partnerships with the private sector.

Since houses formerly built by the private sector are largely out of the reach of many Ghanaians, the Government is addressing the main contributing factors to the high cost of housing: the high cost of land, building materials and lack of long-term construction financing. To this end, the Government has come out with a national land policy to improve land supply and security of title. It has also embarked on a large-scale acquisition of land to constitute land banks to support rental housing and affordable ownership by low-income families. Over the next three years, the Government intends to increase investment in shelter through enhanced facilitation and support of the private sector, civil organizations, community groups and non-governmental organizations and other actors in the sector.

The country is also exploring various sources of long-term concessionary funding to support low-income housing and service delivery, and so far over $250 million has been obtained to deliver over 20,000 housing units within the next three years. We are working towards extending assets to infrastructure and basic services, especially water, sanitation and electricity, by all our citizens.

With regard to access to water, the country has achieved 76 per cent coverage for urban areas and about 46 per cent coverage for rural populations. While extending access to water, we intend, through the Water Resources Commission, to protect the country's water bodies, regulate water use and develop joint

strategies for water-sharing and management with neighbouring countries.

Ghana's new local government system make the people the centre of development, and local government institutions have become vital focal points for the attainment of national development objectives and the realization of the aspirations of the people. Our decentralization programme has raised political awareness, the spirit of popular participation and the feeling of empowerment among communities at the local level, and we are convinced that it constitutes the critical link to the achievement of the goal of our Habitat Agenda.

The Constitution of Ghana provides for the central Government releasing at least 5 per cent of the total revenue of the country to various district assemblies to assist them with their developmental projects. In pursuit of the Habitat Agenda, the Government has directed district assemblies to use at least 20 per cent of this district assembly's common fund to provide local housing to the poor.

Again, in Ghana we set up a Habitat committee, made up of officials of both the Ministries of Works and Housing and Local Government and Rural Development to achieve the Habitat Agenda. Even thought the Habitat office is part of the Ministry of Works and Housing, the Committee is chaired by the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development to ensure greater coordination and collaboration.

As we recommit ourselves to the further implementation of the Habitat Agenda, the issue of poverty eradication must take centre stage in our strategies to promote equitable, socially viable and stable human settlements. In Ghana, poverty continues to be a major problem. The latest surveys indicate that about 22.8 per cent of the urban population and 51.6 per cent of the rural population live below the poverty line. The most vulnerable groups are women, children and the disabled. The Government, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme, has been implementing a national poverty reduction programme to address the challenges of poverty in our society. To underscore the importance it attaches to issues affecting women and their impact on standards of living, the Government has created a ministry for women's affairs with Cabinet rank, headed by a highly respected woman minister.

In the area of disaster preparedness and mitigation, for instance, the recent Accra Stadium disaster in my country, in which 126 people died, woke us up to the realization that there is a lot to be done, and quickly too. Despite the structures we have established since 1996 to work towards preventing or minimizing the risk of disasters, experience has shown that the structures require a great deal of support and resources. Our ability to monitor the implementation of the Habitat Agenda has also suffered from inadequate resources. My ministry is, however, systematically building data on the key indicators identified.

It is obvious that the decisions that are made in other forums are processes to address issues of external trade, debt, international development cooperation and private capital flows, as well as the restructuring of the financial architecture, will determine to a large extent the success of our efforts collectively to meet the major crisis facing human settlements globally. It must be a win-win situation or we will all be the losers in the end. The state of the world gives us all frightening evidence of how easily our urban areas can quickly become the construct of the Hobbesian state of nature.

We hope and we will work in construct with others to ensure that the end of this review process will mark the beginning of a new effort to create conditions for human settlements worthy of our values. That is the way to realize the Habitat Agenda, of providing adequate shelter for all and ensuring the development of sustainable human settlements in the rapidly urbanizing world.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Mopshatla Mabitle, Minister of Local Government of Lesotho.

Mr. Mabitle (Lesotho): I join the speakers before me who have congratulated you, Mr. President, on your election to the stewardship of this special session, a job that you are doing most enviably. It is indeed a great honour and privilege for me and my delegation to address this special session on the progress achieved in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda in Lesotho, five years after the city summit.

In our quest to improve the quality of life in the cities, towns and villages of our country, and within the context of the commitments made at Istanbul, which include the provision of shelter, social development, the eradication of poverty, environmental management, economic development, governance and international

cooperation, we are grateful to share our efforts with this gathering.

With regard to shelter, we have established a broad-based National Habitat Committee to draw up a national shelter policy. This policy, which seeks to create an enabling framework for effective and sustainable shelter delivery, has already received initial endorsement by the Cabinet. In like manner, a broad-based Commission was set up to review the national land policy with a view to aligning it with the principles and commitments of the Habitat agenda.

In the operational area, the Government has resuscitated the low-cost housing schemes that had been abandoned as a housing solution. The Government is also encouraging the private sector to participate in housing delivery by creating a conducive investment climate. Government is further negotiating with commercial banks to provide mortgage financing, an aspect which was hitherto a preserve of a now-privatized government bank.

The Government is also working on a policy to relinquish responsibility for the direct housing of civil servants and to encourage home ownership amongst its employees. Furthermore, the Law Reform Commission and the Land Policy Review Commission have proposed that all laws prohibiting women from enjoying access to land, shelter and credit be repealed.

One of the key interventions in the area of social development is the introduction of free primary education. Today, no child must miss primary education because their parents are poor. Every child who attends school also gets a free meal at school. The school feeding scheme provides much-needed income at the local level, as the local communities are responsible for the feeding programme. Free primary education is open to all age groups. Consequently, school enrolments have swollen and you can find children and parents learning together in tents all over the country, where there is a shortage of facilities.

Suffice it to mention that, in the area of poverty eradication, the Government has, in the course of developing a poverty reduction strategy, established the Lesotho Fund for Community Development, financed through royalties earned from the sale of water to the Republic of South Africa. The Fund is used to finance community-based development projects, especially in the rural areas. The rural communities are provided with training to empower them to plan and execute their development projects.

In the area of environmental management, Parliament has recently passed a National Environmental Bill for purposes of incorporating environmental considerations into development activities.

Another area of great significance to the Habitat Agenda is good governance. My Government has embarked on a public-sector improvement reform programme, which, among other things, aims at improving delivery of services, decentralization and the establishment of democratic local government, as well as improvements in the administration of justice.

Parliament enacted the Local Government Act in 1997. While it is difficult at the moment to hold local government elections, a process is in place to establish transitional urban government structures to uphold principles of public participation in the administration of public affairs. These transitional local government authorities are directly elected through processes that are managed at the community level rather than through conventional election processes.

Another major milestone in the activities of Government is the restructuring of the economy through the privatization of State-owned enterprises, such as utility corporations. This process has released resources for supporting social programmes, as Government no longer subsidizes these enterprises. The privatization programme has attracted major capital injections in the economy, as well as management expertise. It is hoped this policy will result in the stimulation of economic growth, efficiency and job creation. The Government has further created facilities to enable local participation in the privatized state enterprises.

Last but not least, in April this year, the President of South Africa, Mr. Mbeki, signed a landmark agreement with the Prime Minster of Lesotho on cooperation between the two countries. The key objective of this agreement is to lift Lesotho out of the category of least developed country in five years. This is a mammoth task for the two countries and their peoples. Five years is not a long time, but our people are ready for the challenge. Human settlements will play a critical role in the pursuit of this goal and in manifesting its achievements.

It is our sincere hope and desire that all our development partners, including the international donor community, will engage together with us in this ambitious endeavour.

The President: I give the floor to The Honourable Ophelia Hoff Syatumah, representative of Liberia and Acting City Mayor of Monrovia.

Ms. Hoff Syatumah (Liberia): I bring you fraternal greetings and warm felicitations from the President of the Republic of Liberia, Charles Ghankay Taylor, the Government and people of Liberia on this important and unique occasion of Istanbul +5, the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly.

I also wish to express our heartfelt congratulations and deepest sense of appreciation to Mrs. Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka, Executive Director of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), Ms. Axumite Gebre-Egziabher, Coordinator of Istanbul+5, the Conference secretariat and the entire Habitat family for the excellent manner in which this session was organized and for the kind reception and hospitality accorded us since our arrival to participate in these deliberations.

Since this session is being convened to review and assess the implementation of the results of the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), held in Istanbul, Turkey, in June 1996, I would like to take this opportunity to apprise the Assembly of actions taken and progress made by my Government since the convening of Habitat II, as well as in preparation for this Istanbul+5 session.

As a country emerging from civil conflict and confronted with the challenges of rehabilitation, reconstruction and recovery, the issues of shelter and human settlements were accorded high priority in our National Reconstruction Programme 1998-2000, which was submitted to the donor community meeting on Liberia held in April 1998 in Paris, France. Similarly, shelter and human settlements have again been given high priority in the five-year Medium Term Plan 2001-2005, which is currently being formulated.

In preparation for Istanbul+5, we undertook a national review of our Habitat programme, prepared and submitted a country assessment report on the implementation of the Habitat programme in Liberia and updated our National Plan of Action and the urban indicators for Monrovia. We also participated in the Istanbul+5 preparatory meetings.

It is an honour for me now to present to the Assembly an overview of the implementation of the Habitat programme in Liberia and its constraints and problems. In order to ensure effective coordination, collaboration, networking and partnership among the various partners and stakeholders involved in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of housing and human settlements, and to ensure the maximum utilization and application of the limited resources available, an initiative was undertaken by the Government of Liberia to establish the National Habitat Committee of Liberia, chaired by the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs. The composition of the Committee is broad-based; it consists of members of civil society and non-governmental, private and community-based entities. The work of the Committee is facilitated through well-defined subcommittees with clearly defined sectoral functions, work programmes, expected outputs and targets. Additionally, as further support for the work of the Committee and the implementation of Habitat programmes and projects in the country, the Government provides budgetary appropriation as counterpart funding. Although the Government is constrained by limited resources, this appropriation is increased on a yearly basis to reflect the commitment of the Government to the programme.

With regard to specific programmes and projects, the United Nations Development Programme and United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) have provided technical and financial assistance to the Government of Liberia, which has resulted in the preparation of programme support documents for the reconstruction of housing infrastructure and services. The total value is $11.924 million. At the moment, there is an ongoing $1.5 million Government of Liberia-UNDP-Habitat Capacity Building Programme for the Reconstruction of Rural Housing in Liberia. This project is building capacity at both national and local levels for the reconstruction and effective delivery of housing in Liberia. This project also deals with the transfer of appropriate local building material technology and trains local artisans and community residents in the production and utilization of improved local building materials, as well as simple construction techniques. There is also a microcredit component that is providing credit assistance to construction-related

microenterprises for employment and income-generation to reduce poverty among the beneficiaries.

Habitat For Humanity International, an ecumenical non-governmental organization based in Georgia, United States of America, is providing building materials and loan assistance to rural dwellers for the construction and ownership of simple, decent and affordable homes. The beneficiaries are to repay the loans over an extended period of 10 years. The repayment funds are placed in a revolving fund for the expansion of the programme in targeted communities. The loans are interest-free. Shelter Afrique, a pan-African housing finance institution of which Liberia is a member, has agreed in principle to provide a $1 million line of credit to the Liberian Bank for Development and Investment for onward lending to potential beneficiaries for the rehabilitation and restoration of damaged housing units in Monrovia and its environs.

A number of private investors and developers are also negotiating with the Government, through the National Housing Authority and the National Investment Commission, for the construction of various types of housing estates on the basis of a variety of models.

Despite the efforts made for the successful implementation of programmes and projects, there are problems and constraints. There is a funding gap which is inhibiting the expansion and replication of these programmes and projects in other parts of the country where there is a dire need for housing and services. Furthermore, the prevailing poor road conditions in the country are also having a negative impact on rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes. The impact of the civil conflict has contributed to weak institutions and structures in government, thereby affecting its ability for planning and programming and its provision of complementary support and backstopping services for reconstruction and development initiatives.

Despite support by the Government and the international community for Habitat programmes and projects, additional assistance will be required for the formulation and development of a national housing policy and shelter strategy for the effective implementation of shelter and human settlements. The Government of Liberia would also appreciate technical and capacity-building assistance to strengthen national and local institutions and structures to cope with the challenges of the reconstruction process.

The full resettlement and reintegration of internally and externally displaced Liberians cannot be achieved without successful shelter and human settlements programmes. I should therefore like to appeal to the international community, particularly our development partners, UNDP and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, to seek further assistance on our behalf for the successful implementation of Habitat programmes in Liberia, as they relate to the implementation of the Habitat National Plan of Action, which was reviewed and updated for this Istanbul+5 session.

I should like to take this opportunity to call for greater cooperation and networking among regional Member States and partners in order to ensure proper coordination to achieve the best possible results, taking advantage of the UNDP Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries initiative.

Finally, on behalf of the President, the Government and the people of Liberia, I wish to extend our thanks and appreciation to the international community and our development partners, in particular for their continuous support for our reconstruction process. I also wish to reaffirm the Government's commitment to and support for the Habitat Agenda. We will take appropriate action to accelerate the implementation of the Habitat programme in Liberia.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Bouathong Vonglokham, Minister for Communications, Transport, Post and Construction of the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Mr. Vonglokham (Lao People's Democratic Republic) (*spoke in French*): The goal of this special session is to enable Member States of the United Nations to appraise the implementation of the Habitat Agenda and Istanbul Declaration, which were adopted in that city in 1996. On this occasion, we, the Member States, are being asked to outline the housing policies we will be implementing in the years to come.

We believe this to be a great challenge for all countries, organizations and stakeholders because the world's population has grown rapidly. In addition, the economy has entered an era of globalization and active competition, the environment is in a worrisome state, and non-renewable natural resources are being over-

exploited. It is high time for Governments, representatives of local authorities and civil society partners to exchange views, mobilize world opinion and draw up more effective plans of action to make more rapid and concrete progress.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic is, economically speaking, among the least developed countries. We are a land-locked country whose geographical features are not conducive to good transportation or agricultural production, as two thirds of our land area is mountainous. It is only in the last 25 years that communications systems have been developed. The building of national, regional and local roads is helping to link provinces and districts.

Our country experienced a long war of aggression for three decades before attaining total liberation, in 1975. The war left millions of tons of buried bombs and other unexploded ordnance, a fact that has been a major obstacle to the socio-economic development of the country. Every year at least 100 persons are victims of explosions caused by these weapons.

In 2000, the population of the Lao People's Democratic Republic was estimated to be 5.2 million, consisting of three main ethnic groups. The rural population makes up 80 per cent of the total population, with the other 20 per cent living in cities. Generally speaking, people in the north live without electricity or sources of energy. Living conditions there are harsh, the economy is less developed, income is low and people are very close to nature. The Government is therefore determined to develop the economy of the northern regions in future years.

Due to the difficult economic situation in recent years, the Government has adopted a policy of encouraging investment in order to develop urban infrastructure and facilities in a number of cities. Those investments have improved the quality of urban life, trade, communications, and tourism. With regard to governance and institutions, the Government established a policy of decentralization that shifts authority to district and village leaders, who in turn implement the Government's policies.

Our Government's long-term plans for the period 2001-2020 set out the major goals in the areas of infrastructure development, restructuring the telecommunications system, urban development, potable water provision, transportation, environmental management, economic development, the establishment a new institutional framework, and the solving of housing problems. The main challenge for local authorities is therefore the management of cities.

By 2020, the Lao People's Democratic Republic will have about 8.3 million inhabitants. Solving housing problems is therefore a major challenge for the Lao Government. Many existing homes do not meet basic standards. Generally speaking, those houses are made of makeshift materials and lack proper sanitation.

The Government's social development policy seeks to have no poor families by 2010. Another goal is to have our country graduate from the group of least developed countries by 2020. This policy includes stopping slash-and-burn methods of agriculture and creating new professions or stable jobs for the population. We sincerely believe that the implementation of such a policy will help in the international effort to preserve the environment.

We are also implementing a poverty reduction policy and a policy to promote the status of women and children.

These are all major problems that we must confront in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Our Government will make great efforts to implement these policies, as well as the Istanbul+5 declaration to be adopted by the General Assembly at this special session.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Secretary-General, the Executive Director of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements and all the representatives and participants present here for their active contributions to help make this special session a success.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. María Eugenia Brizuela de Ávila, Minister for Foreign Affairs of El Salvador.

Mrs. Brizuela de Ávila (El Salvador) (*spoke in Spanish*): The holding of this special session of the General Assembly on the implementation of the Habitat Agenda is a good opportunity for us to reiterate our commitments and adopt innovative initiatives and measures that can make it possible to redouble efforts to achieve the broad objectives of adequate shelter for all and sustainable development for human settlements.

El Salvador has taken important steps to comply with the commitments entered into at the "Urban

Summit", held at Istanbul in 1996. Our achievements include a modest but sustainable reduction in the housing deficit, which decreased by 4 per cent from 1996 to 2000, even though in 1998, due to the impact of Hurricane Mitch, the deficit rose by 0.8 per cent. Furthermore, urban development plans have been elaborated for five cities of national importance — San Salvador, Santa Ana, San Miguel and Usulután — which constitute technical orientation instruments for the development of human settlements.

We have also devised a Salvadoran housing policy whose programmes emphasize support for the lowest-income households. Its priority areas include savings; housing subsidy and financing; land legalization; neighbourhood improvement; human settlements; housing without borders; property leasing; high-altitude housing; lot certification; and management of environmental hazards.

Other advances are linked to the process of drafting and subsequent implementation of El Salvador's national plan for territorial organization and development, a joint project of the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development. This is being carried out in coordination with all relevant governmental and private institutions. The implementation of this plan will begin in the second half of this year, and within its framework we will organize our urban areas, natural preserves, areas of agricultural development and areas containing other natural resources. The plan also includes a system of collectivity among regions. This will help to determine the geographical location of investments in order to promote the balanced development of our national territory.

Along those same lines, we have formulated a plan for the territorial development of the San Andrés valley in the sub-basin of Rio Sucio, which is a tributary of the Lempa River — the largest river in the country — adjacent to the metropolitan area of San Salvador. Twelve municipalities and approximately 100 governmental and non-governmental organizations and agencies are participating in the plan, as well as interested private companies that working in that particular area.

These are some examples of what El Salvador has done in compliance with the Habitat II agenda. We would like, however, to emphasize the importance taken on by the question of human settlements in El Salvador since January 2001, because of the disaster caused by the two earthquakes that recently occurred in the course of a single month. This was the worst natural disaster in our recent history.

As a Government, our first priority was to save lives and to help the wounded. Then we rescued those people who were buried but were still living, and set up an airlift to rescue communities trapped by landslides. After the emergency, our greatest challenge was to provide housing for 200,000 families that had lost their homes. We built 160,000 houses during the first stage; the families concerned and the local authorities participated in this project. Secondly, we put up 75,000 new temporary housing units in towns and neighbourhoods that needed particular attention.

This effort was unprecedented in our national experience. The country's historical housing-construction capacity is 20,000 units per year. But in the space of four months, we provided minimum temporary housing to more than 225,000 families — that is to say, one-fourth of the population.

Thanks to United Nations Member States, international solidarity, Salvadorans living abroad, and international and non-governmental organizations, we have begun the process of reconstruction.

The reality is that, in developing countries, human settlements are growing quickly, particularly in urban areas. For this reason, that we are convinced that promising results will be achieved at this special session on the Habitat Agenda.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Péter Szaló, Deputy State Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Hungary.

Mr. Szaló (Hungary): First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to those who participated in the preparations for this special session of the General Assembly, which offers us an excellent opportunity to discuss human settlement issues in the new century.

Hungary, a Central European country which has been a modern State for more than a thousand years, falls into the medium category of European countries with respect to its population and size. Its urban population represents 63 per cent of its 10 million inhabitants.

We are in full agreement with the statement delivered by Sweden on behalf of the European Union presidency. I should like to highlight some aspects of Hungarian activities in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

Building a multiparty democratic constitutional State and a market economy in the 1990s brought about far-reaching changes at all levels of society. As a result of the comprehensive changes which took place in a short period of time, radical regroupings of the socio-economic spatial structure have taken place.

Hungary had already taken measures in the spirit of Habitat even before the Habitat Agenda was conceived, but the worldwide process which was launched in Vancouver in 1976, and strengthened in Istanbul in 1996, has undoubtedly had a great impact on regional and housing policy decisions in most countries. Hungary has learned a lot from the Habitat documents and has done its best to fulfil the goals and implement the policy measures which were discussed at a number of conferences organized by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements.

Hungary's intention to accede to the European Union also required the modernization of its regional policy. The European Spatial Development Perspective is considered a guiding document for the future. The actual requirements of that Perspective fully met the principles defined in the Istanbul Declaration, especially as regards sustainable development. The Habitat Agenda accelerated the transformation, which consists of the regulation of the regional institutional system and the modification of the legal background and financing system. It also strengthened international contacts and initiated the elaboration of a spatial information system.

At the governmental level, several measures were taken to establish a decentralized institutional, financial and decision-making system for regional and settlement development policy. The following objectives give the appropriate direction for the practical implementation of regional and local policies: enlargement of local employment possibilities through job creation; enlargement of the basic infrastructure; improvement of the quality of life; elaboration of regional information technology strategies; improved communication in rural areas; rehabilitation and protection of local values; decrease of migration from rural areas; increased qualification level of the rural population; village development and reconstruction; reduction of spatial differentiation within regions and municipalities; improvement of conditions of equal access to infrastructure services; decrease in non-regulated land use; and the strengthening of partnership relations in development efforts.

These objectives have been adopted by the Parliament, within the framework of the National Regional Development Perspective, and will be implemented in the form of regional development programmes. In implementing the idea of sustainable development, the Parliament has regulated the land-use system and the spatial structure of sensitive and urbanized areas.

At the millennium, the protection of the environment and the conservation of natural resources are major challenges in Hungary. With special regard to future accession to the European Union, Hungary has to take appropriate measures to improve environmental quality and eliminate existing deficiencies in legislation and its implementation, while ensuring extension of social welfare and increased economic competitiveness. Although the Act on Nature Conservation and Environmental Protection is in conformity with European standards, the majority of practical measures are still ahead of us, especially regarding air quality, water quality, ground waters, waste water, soil, waste, noise, nature conservation and biological diversity.

In Hungary, the negative social consequences of the transformation to a market economy have resulted in the emergence of a social group that has found itself outside the labour market. The poorest strata amount to four to five per cent of the population, and one third of them are of Roma origin. People living in the countryside in weak labour markets, people who are permanently unemployed, families with handicapped members or with three or more children, single-parent families, single elderly women and so on are particularly vulnerable to increasing poverty. In order to ease the above social difficulties, new components of the social welfare system have been introduced in the health care and pension systems.

To protect families and children, the Hungarian Parliament adopted a law on the protection of children and management of the system of guardianship. Equality for women with regard to education,

employment, or other kinds of situations in which they may face handicaps is also regulated by law.

In 2000 the Hungarian Government worked out a comprehensive economic development plan. The housing programme of the plan envisages the construction of 40,000 new homes every year. The quality targets of the plan are similarly important. These include: ensuring the possibility of obtaining a first home in market conditions and by using State subsidies, increasing the share of tenement sectors in harmony with the characteristics of different regions and towns, increasing mobility through housing policy instruments, strengthening the equality of opportunity for elderly and handicapped people, and improving the quality of the natural and developed environment. All these development efforts are in close relationship with Habitat goals as defined in the Istanbul Declaration.

Our experience is that severe problems of a society cannot be solved separately. An integrated approach is needed in planning and implementation to find solutions to economic and infrastructure development questions, unemployment, social problems, poverty and crime.

Today, Hungary is a successful country with a growing economy. The local authorities, who enjoy a large degree of autonomy, have made significant contributions to economic development, improvement of the infrastructure and implementation of environmental measures. They play a crucial role in regional policy to create a balanced spatial structure in partnership with Government institutions.

Five years after the second United Nations conference on Habitat, Hungary is aware that the conference has made essential contributions to the results of development measures in all countries of the world.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. David Aptsiauri, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Georgia.

Mr. Aptsiauri (Georgia): The antecedents of my country and its spiritual and material culture go back many a millennium, but the new history of Georgia, like that of the other post-Soviet countries, covers only a decade. It is worth noting that precisely half of this decade has passed since Habitat II. It was truly a period of historical importance for Georgia, singling out and bringing to the fore the problems of immediate interest to Habitat, one of the fundamental global movements of the contemporary world.

Sustainable development of settlements and adequate shelter for everyone are the goals which motivate us all. These are also the goals that call for stability in the country, good-neighbourly regional relations and the merger of the vectors of national and global development. Sad to say, from this standpoint much fails to come within the range of possibility for small countries. The fate of 300,000 displaced persons from the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions, and the problems of providing them with accommodations, workplaces and minimal subsistence, now bear hard on our settlements and accommodations, and these difficulties have to be solved with assistance from the international community.

The representatives of the countries going through the same situation will agree that such a background does not in any way contribute to the sustainable development of settlements and the provision of adequate shelter. However, the systemic reforms within the last five years in Georgia have acquired an irreversible character. In 1997, a new civil code was enacted which created a firm legislative environment for the recently established and multitudinous stratum of real estate owners. In the same period the Parliament of Georgia adopted a series of laws that recognized private ownership of urban lands and regulated the principal relations in the sphere of land utilization. By the end of this year legislation will have largely covered the problems mentioned above.

A legalized real estate market is now under development. Competitions and auctions are held to acquire plots of land, mortgages are becoming established, and so on.

One priority for public development is the decentralization of authorities and of competence, which extends to urban development, housing, the communal economy, the delegation of engineering management to the local level, and communications infrastructure.

The protection of the cultural heritage has traditionally been a highly successful field in Georgia. Today too, new forms of activity have been developed. Georgia has joined the field-specific international conventions and agreements. The UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites includes the unique mountainous

region of the Upper Svaneti, the ancient capital of Georgia, Mtskheta, and the Gelati architectural complex, and Tbilisi may also be included in this list. The pilot project of Georgia and the World Bank in the protection of cultural heritage is being carried out successfully.

The system of urban indicators established in Georgia in 1996 opens up new opportunities for the management of the development of the country's settlements. This system forms the basis of the practice of annual national reports on urban development, to which Georgia returned in 2000. The general census of the Georgian population scheduled in two years will facilitate obtaining reliable statistical data, laying special emphasis on such fields as population migration, displaced persons, domestic economies, sanitation conditions, etc.

High on the list of positive development is the mobilization of our public at large and of community and non-governmental organizations. This is of paramount importance given the negative social and psychological impact of 70 years of the Soviet system on city populations, the results of which have been indifference, the weakening of city awareness, a sponging mentality and so on. This is what lies at the very root of the tough condominium ideology that has emerged with the privatization of nearly 90 per cent of apartments and the slow pace of setting up partnerships with property owners.

Broadly speaking, the ongoing reforms in the country are not duly reflected in terms of territorial organization and urban development. On the contrary, we are faced with such challenges as increasing poverty in cities, the emergence of homelessness, unauthorized construction, a reduction of public spaces, the destruction of green and recreational zones, the absence of a public housing system, et cetera.

Adding to our society's concerns is the high level of corruption, which manifests itself in the urban development sphere. The international organizations rendering assistance to Georgia often take note of this. There also exists a sort of imbalance in the priorities of these organizations. Their projects give scant, and often only pro forma, attention to the problems of urban development and housing. The assistance of such countries as the United States, Germany and others has produced more results in this regard.

Note should also be taken of the fact that our local specialists are fully conversant with the current situation in the urban development and housing sphere. This entitles us to raise the question of altering the foreign assistance format and carrying out a reorganization. In our view, today it would be more effective to move from the level of consultations with foreign experts to that of concrete targeted projects.

It is impossible to block social and urban development for even a day. I therefore believe that the Assembly will understand me if I compare my country to a car that badly needs to have parts replaced in order to keep running.

It is in that political, social and economic framework that we should study the management of urban development and housing — not only from an administrative perspective, but also by employing objective criteria suitable to our society and our cities. We in Georgia hold out the hope that we shall soon join those countries with high living standards, dignity, happiness and hope — with regard to both city environment and families. What leads me to speak in this way is respect for our history, the will of our citizens and a sense of responsibility towards future generations.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Marjan Dodovski, Vice-Minister of Environment and Physical Planning of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Mr. Dodovski (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia): It is my great pleasure and privilege to address this special session of the United Nations dedicated to an overall review and appraisal of the progress achieved in the five years since the holding in Istanbul of the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements.

Allow me, at the outset, to express the conviction of the Republic of Macedonia that the preparatory process that led to this session, the fruitful discussion at this session, and the draft declaration that we are to adopt will contribute to finding adequate solutions for the problems of the development of human settlements at the beginning of the new millennium. That will provide new impetus for the implementation of the goals set forth in the Millennium Declaration of the United Nations — above all with regard to the eradication of poverty and securing adequate shelter for all people.

Mr. Al-Ashtal (Yemen), Vice-President, took the Chair.

At the national level, the goals, principles and recommendations contained in the Habitat Agenda and the Istanbul Declaration, as well as the level of their implementation, constitute the basis for the preparation of the national report of the Republic of Macedonia. The strategic orientation of the Republic of Macedonia is to act in order to enable and promote adequate habitats for all citizens by developing safer, cleaner, healthier and more sustainable human settlements.

Population policy is one of the basic elements in planning the country's future. By pursuing an integrated population policy, maximum effectiveness is achieved in the utilization of the space and resources available, in humanizing living conditions for families and society, in reducing tendencies to migrate and in creating conditions for more equitable regional development.

The basic regulatory framework defining the spatial organization of the State for the period up to 2020 is provided for in the spatial plan of the Republic of Macedonia, which is currently in the process of being approved by the Parliament. The plan sets out the goals and concepts of spatial development in different areas, as well as the conditions for their realization.

The territory of the Republic of Macedonia covers 25,713 square kilometres. Its population, which in 1998 was estimated to be 2,015,000, is projected to reach 2,225,000 by the year 2020. The country's population is concentrated predominantly in urban areas, primarily in the city of Skopje, the capital and main administrative, economic and cultural centre of Macedonia. This trend is leading to a decrease in the population of other urban and rural areas in the country, as well as to their overall economic sidelining. At present, 59.7 per cent of the population lives in urban areas, and 40.3 in rural areas.

The enactment of the new State spatial plan and the new law on local self-government, as well as the designing of adequate programmes and projects aimed at improving housing conditions in human settlements, and in particular the quality of life in small urban and rural areas, clearly define the Government's policies that field.

As a country with an economy in transition, the changes that have taken place in the political and economic environment in the Republic of Macedonia are adequately reflected in its housing policy and in its policy on sustainable human settlement development in general. The housing policy is based on a new approach to housing development and investments in this field, a new methodology to appraise location and the harmonization of housing and land policies.

In this context, in pursuing the housing policy at the national level, the Government of the Republic of Macedonia pays particular attention to providing shelter to persons living on social welfare by allocating 25 per cent of State housing properties built annually to that end. As part of this policy, the Government of the Republic of Macedonia has developed a programme to provide shelter to young couples, and it is also making efforts to provide favourable conditions to solve housing problems by granting loans to that end.

An integral part of the Government's overall policy for the sustainable development of human settlements includes environmental protection and environmental impact assessment. Several strategic documents have been adopted to that end, including the national environmental action plan, with special emphasis on preparation of local environmental action plans, and the national strategy for solid waste and waste water. The national strategy for sustainable development is in the process of preparation.

The Republic of Macedonia, being situated in the troublesome Balkan region, faced extraordinary challenges during the Kosovo refugee crisis in 1999, when for a short period of time the country provided shelter to more than 360,000 refugees from Kosovo, equivalent to 18 per cent of Macedonia's population. This, of course, had a negative impact on the economic, social, health and environmental conditions in the country. In spite of these problems, nine refugee camps were built, encompassing an area of more than 90 hectares, with complete infrastructure, roads to access the camps, water supply and sewage systems and electrification. More than 160,000 persons were sheltered in the camps and others accommodated in private houses and families. The Macedonian Government acted responsibly and succeeded in coping with the extremely difficult situation imposed during the Kosovo crisis.

Regrettably, as is known, today my country is faced with terrorism by Albanian extremists. Despite being condemned by the Security Council, the

European Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, other regional organizations and the Governments of all the countries in the region, and despite the unanimous calls for them to lay down their arms and to disband, they continue to pursue their terrorist activities.

At present, Kumanovo, a city of 100,000 inhabitants north of Skopje, is facing severe water shortages due to the terrorists' blocking and cutting off the water supplies from the nearby reservoirs, and their taking civilians hostage in the villages surrounding the city and using them as human shields, thus using human settlements and their inhabitants for their terrorist aims. Agricultural activities in the area have been badly affected.

This, of course, has a very negative impact on the overall situation in the country, endangering the lives of Macedonian citizens, democratic development, economic reforms and social stability. However, the Republic of Macedonia is determined to overcome the present difficulties. In this context, our efforts to further implement the goals of the Habitat Agenda will continue.

The Republic of Macedonia has accepted the challenges of developing human settlements at the global, regional and local levels, fully aware of the important impact cities and the villages have on cultural, economic and social life in every State. The Republic of Macedonia is making efforts to contribute actively to building more human settlements in the global village and to reaffirm existing partnerships and create new ones for action at the international, regional, national and local levels, aimed at improving the human environment.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I give the floor to Mr. Henrique Cossa, Vice-Minister of Public Works and Housing of Mozambique.

Mr. Cossa (Mozambique): Allow me to congratulate Mr. Holkeri on his election to preside over this special session of the United Nations on Habitat. I am confident that under his skilful guidance and with his outstanding experience, our deliberations will be crowned with success.

Despite the substantial progress made since Istanbul, much remains to be done. Today millions of people in developing countries still live in abject poverty without adequate shelter and basic services. Moreover, the increasing flow of people into urban areas dramatically increases urban poverty, having a major impact on women and children and causing social conflicts and environmental degradation.

The challenge for sustainable human settlements development is still far from being fully addressed, and we believe that this is the proper time for us to strengthen our commitment to the Habitat Agenda. The overall goal at this special session should be to ensure its further and effective implementation.

The world leaders who assembled at the Millennium Summit identified the reduction of poverty as the overriding challenge that humanity faces. With regard to the provision of adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements, they resolved to achieve by 2020 a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum-dwellers. Mozambique fully endorses these commitments and calls upon the international community to spare no effort to ensure their operationalization.

In following up the recommendations of the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), the Government of Mozambique adopted a national plan of action on human settlements. With this plan we focused our actions on various relevant areas.

The Government approved a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper for the period 2001 to 2005. The actions and activities foreseen in the Paper cover economic, social, political and cultural aspects, to be carried out in programmes and projects at the local, provincial and national levels. The target is to maintain an average growth of 8 per cent, which will reduce the poverty rate to below 50 per cent by the end of this decade.

The Government has established a national housing fund to provide land and financial credit for housing construction and rehabilitation for low-income people and young couples. The Government has transferred about 70 per cent of its real estate stock to Mozambicans at highly subsidized prices, and the income generated from these sales has been allocated to the national housing fund.

A national council for sustainable development, which comprises Government institutions, civil society and the private sector, has been established within the country, with a view to coordinating implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

Similarly, a national programme for environmental management is being implemented, with a view to controlling the environmental degradation and creating a local management capacity. The dissemination of educational programmes on environment and on the use of natural resources has also played a crucial role in the protection of the environment.

In 1997, 33 local autarchies in 23 cities and 10 towns were established, and in 1998 their representative organs were elected. These local authorities play a crucial role in urban and peri-urban planning and management. In this regard, we have witnessed an improvement in the living conditions of the populations in the urban centres, including the better provision of services, sanitation and clean water.

In Mozambique, women have been involved in the promotion of sustainable human settlements and adequate shelter by carrying out various projects and programmes of a social and economic nature. They also play an important role in the sustainable use of natural resources, as well as in the preservation and management of the environment.

Women, particularly widows, single mothers and those heading households, benefit from a considerable share of the national housing fund for the construction or rehabilitation of their houses.

Mozambique was affected by floods for two years running — 2000 and 2001. The floods seriously set back the implementation of the aforementioned programmes, projects and actions.

To avert this situation, we have fully directed our efforts towards the reconstruction and rehabilitation of roads and social infrastructure, the promotion of income-generation activities and the encouragement of populations to abandon areas of risk and settle themselves in more secure ones. Allow me to seize this opportunity to thank countries and the international community in general for having extended their support to minimize the suffering of the Mozambican people in those tragic moments of our history, as well as for helping us in the post-flood reconstruction process.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm my Government's commitment to the goals of the Habitat Agenda and I hope that the outcome of this special session will guide all nations in their efforts aimed at achieving sustainable human settlements and adequate shelter for all.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Birhanu Tamrat, Vice-Minister, Ministry of Work and Urban Development of Ethiopia.

Mr. Tamrat (Ethiopia): First of all, on behalf of the Government and people of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, it is a great honour for me to address this very important session, which is expected to deliberate on vital issues of human settlements development five years after the adoption of the Habitat Agenda and the Istanbul Declaration.

The Government of Ethiopia is committed to implementing the Habitat Agenda through the progressive realization of the right to adequate housing, providing legal security of tenure and equal access to land for all people. My Government welcomes the principle behind the campaign for improved urban governance and secure tenure. In fact, this is consistent with the ongoing measures taken by my Government. However, in order to address these principles and those of the Habitat Agenda in general, much remains to be done in the translation of the global plan of action into local and national urban development strategies focusing mainly on institutional capacity-building.

The African regional ministerial conference on the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, held in Addis Ababa from 6 to 8 November last year, has provided us with an excellent opportunity to assess the progress made since 1996, the challenges and the way forward in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda in Africa. This conference demonstrated that the period after Habitat II was characterized by a high degree of partnership and participation in devising follow-up activities, resulting in the adoption of a common set of approaches and exemplary contributions from a wide range of partners. The conference was concluded with the adoption of the Addis Ababa Declaration on Human Settlements in the New Millennium. I am sure all will agree with me that this document is a significant milestone on African's road to implementing our common identified agenda.

Taking this opportunity, I would like to explain some of the important issues which would reflect my Government's position related to the Habitat Agenda implementation.

Since 85 per cent of our population live in rural settlements, we believe that promoting the role of our urban-rural linkages is of crucial importance to sustainable human settlements development. As we have clearly mentioned in our national report for the preparation of this special session, the second five-year programme of my Government has focused, among other things, on strengthening the efforts made in urban areas to enhance their contributions towards increasing social and economic development activities and improving the living conditions of the urban population.

Although there is a strong belief that the developing nations of the world, including in Africa, are being urbanized rapidly, people in that part of the world are still predominantly living in rural areas. Hence, we would like to take this opportunity to remind the General Assembly at this special session that urban development and shelter strategies favouring the poor and the rural dimension of sustainable urban development deserve due attention and consideration.

Although massive and strenuous efforts have been undertaken to implement the Habitat Agenda at different levels, there should be a strong and proper mechanism put in place to ensure the mobilization and coordination of external financial resources and technical assistance. International cooperation should increase its efforts to strengthen and improve the capacities of developing countries. Direct overseas investment should be channelled to the provision of better shelter for all, urban infrastructures, environmental improvement and institutional capacity-building.

Finally, I would like to express my Government's wish that this special session come up with decisions that could pave the way for addressing successfully the implementation of the Habitat Agenda in different countries, which in turn would contribute to the improvement of the lives of our people. Furthermore, I also hope that this session will help to develop better understanding and cooperation between the developed and developing States and other important partners in our joint effort to meet the global challenges of human settlements.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Adlan El Siddig Elkhalifa, Secretary-General of the National Council for Physical Development, Ministry of the Environment and Physical Development of the Sudan.

Mr. El Siddig Elkhalifa (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is an honour for me to address this Assembly on behalf of the Government of Sudan. I wish this session every possible success.

Ever since the first United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat) in Vancouver 1976, which called for the development of human settlements in urban and rural areas, great changes have occurred because of population growth and socio-economic, cultural, political and environmental transformations. Many citizens in developing countries now live below the poverty line and in inadequate shelter. Thus, in 1992 the General Assembly adopted resolution 47/180, calling for the convening in Istanbul of Habitat II.

Two important principles were adopted at that Conference, relating to the need to provide adequate shelter for all and to ensure sustainable human settlements development in a civilized world. That is why a global strategy must be based on rehabilitation, transparency and the participation of all. The Sudan took an active part in the work of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), and we have played an active and distinctive role at the local, regional, Arab, African and international levels.

Our activities have been supported by the President of the Republic, and a national committee was set up under the chairmanship of the Minister for Social Planning, representing all governmental and non-governmental bodies, as well as volunteer, civil society and women's organizations, the private sector and the media. Five years after the 1996 Istanbul Conference, the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) invited us to review and appraise progress made in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. Given the magnitude and importance of this question, we have reactivated the national committee in order to draw up a national report, which was mandated to follow up on the implementation of the Habitat Agenda so as to provide continuity in the development of human settlements.

We hope that at this special session the General Assembly will work to assess the achievements of the Istanbul Agenda, and we strongly commend the initiative of the Centre for Human Settlements to act as a focal point within the United Nations system for the

implementation of the Habitat Agenda. We welcome the two Global Campaigns launched by Habitat.

The Sudan took a number of steps in implementing the Istanbul Agenda. At the national level, we elaborated a comprehensive human settlements development strategy covering the period from 1999 to 2002, in which we stressed national unity, peace, decentralization and subdividing the country into 26 provinces with equal distribution of wealth. We have also drawn up human settlements and urban development action plans. We have set up several bodies, including a national urban development council, a national land-use body, a national committee for geographical surveys and a body to deal with federal lands.

As part of our overall national strategy, we are making a very significant attempt to provide economic reform; it will liberate our economy, increase the availability of investment and strengthen the private sector. It incorporates production, monetary and income-production policies. We have also been implementing incremental policies of privatization in various economic sectors and have been working to reformulate State institutions.

I would like to say that my Government is doing everything it can to provide adequate shelter and land ownership for all. We have carried out a number of activities to this end, including a project to provide prefabricated housing, other Government housing projects and a programme to provide housing for all. Mindful of the importance of sustainable human settlements, we have tried to work within the provisions of the Khartoum convention for peace and to provide the necessary conditions to support peace throughout the country. Within this framework, the programme to create villages of peace in the southern part of my country is supported by the State and by United Nations agencies, as well as by the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Development Programme and some local and international non-governmental organizations.

Our State's policies stress social development issues in particular, as well as the idea of integrating sectoral plans and programmes. We have also elaborated a poverty-reduction programme to try to support disadvantaged people and eliminate begging. To that end, we have created a programme and a specialized fund to protect families. We have set up a national fund to provide pensions and one to help students. We have also set up a *zakat* body and a savings bank, as well as a mechanism to provide health insurance.

Turning to the environment, our national strategy seeks to optimally use, invest in, preserve and protect our natural resources, and we have drawn up programmes to achieve that goal by setting up an infrastructure to provide facilities, drinking water, sanitation and adequate drainage and implement environmental protection plans. The Sudan has been working to reduce the power of the central authorities in the interests of implementing the principle of decentralization. We have provided local authorities with greater power and created funds to support State and local authorities.

I should now like to refer to voluntary work programmes that are attempting to expand popular participation and the role of civil society organizations. We have called upon all volunteer organizations and other national organizations active in the promotion of human settlements to learn from best practices.

Regarding the fulfilment of our national objectives to create adequate shelter for all of our citizens, we recognize that future prospects for the development of human settlements will depend on future economic conditions. The implementation of the Habitat objectives should not be disregarded in the consideration of oppressed peoples, particularly the Palestinian people, who have been struggling under Israeli occupation for a very long time now, and this is why we appeal to the international community to support the Palestinian people in their struggle for peace and safe living conditions.

In conclusion, we would like to say that the implementation of the Habitat II Agenda and programme of action will depend on the sense of responsibility of our local governments, the international community, donors and international organizations, all of which are working to attain these noble objectives.

The Acting President *(spoke in Arabic)*: Before calling on the next speaker, I would like to remind the Assembly that speakers should stay within the time limit of five minutes.

I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Cristián Cordova Cordero, Vice-Minister of Housing and Urban Development of Ecuador.

Mr. Cordova Cordero (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of my delegation, I would like to express our thanks to the President for his very skilful guidance as the head of this special session to review and appraise the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. Its relevance will make it possible to improve quality of life, particularly in countries where there are still undeniable imbalances affecting the liberties and well-being of individuals and communities.

The Ecuadorian Government is committed to meeting the goals put forward in the Habitat Agenda. As concerns aspects directly related to housing, we have pledged to strengthen local and provincial governments and the decentralization of the State, among other significant issues.

The system of housing incentives in urban and surrounding areas is an example of our work. For low-income families the State provides a one-time, direct subsidy that does not need to be paid back. This is a tool that guarantees the right to housing. It also reactivates the economy by stimulating the private construction market and redistributes revenue towards the lower-income sectors. It encourages saving and stimulates the private financial sector to grant mortgage credits.

In order to overcome the crisis in rural sectors, of which one of the visible impacts is accelerated urban growth, there are also rural housing programmes. In addition to this direct subsidy, they involve self-management and community participation.

Modernizing the State — by reconceptualizing what it is and what it does, and by transferring responsibilities and powers to society and local governmental bodies is one of the most important challenges being taken up by Ecuador. The decentralization of the State, participation of the citizenry and accountability are all tools that are in the process of being implemented or elaborated. Some immediate goals for this year, however, will obviously require a long time to be totally consolidated. To that end, we have begun looking at the consequences of the transfer of competencies and resources from the central Government to the provincial and municipal levels, and proposals are being formulated.

Some municipalities are likewise carrying out plans to strengthen and improve their management and capacities, and they are implementing concrete policies and actions, with positive and visible results in the efficiency of local management. They have defined governmental, non-governmental, social and private participatory bodies, with a view to guaranteeing a systematic connection between the population and the local government in planning, implementation, follow-up and assessment of policies, programmes and projects.

The Ministry of Urban Development and Housing, together with the State Bank and the Association of Ecuadorian Municipalities has devised a programme for technical and credit assistance, which should be implemented this year for community improvement. A national system of property taxes is envisaged as a basis for planning and tax collection.

Thus, we have a set of activities designed to achieve the genuine practice of democratic principles, to ensure good governance and to increase social equity and environmental sustainability by means of rationalization, modernization and transparency in our government actions, and also through the participation and shared responsibility of the citizenry.

However, the achievement of these objectives does not depend solely on the political will of the national Government or other government bodies, nor solely on technical resources or the possibilities inherent in the private sector.

Ecuador has economic and financial limitations in its public and private sectors, and resources are severely limited for different reasons. One example is the burden on the national budget represented by external debt servicing, which absorbs more than 40 per cent of the country's resources.

We should also mention obstacles to access to new markets, to the expansion of sales and to the diversification of exports. These obstacles originate from the policies of industrialized countries that establish exceptionally high tariffs, quotas, health restrictions, technical restrictions, or defensive measures, all of which have protectionist aims. Above and beyond these obstacles, the competition is unfair because of the high subsidies that those countries grant to inefficient and non-competitive sectors.

It is necessary for international actions and commitments to be integrated so as to ensure coherent qualitative and quantitative results over the long term. The external debt, international trade, science and technology, official development assistance — in sum, all questions relating to development must be addressed and, above all, resolved effectively on the basis of the fundamental values mentioned in the Millennium Declaration. This includes solidarity and shared responsibility in order to lay a solid foundation leading to competitive economic growth; otherwise, the facts will be incongruous with Governments' expressions of will, their national macroeconomic policies and their intentions to make Government and administration more transparent and more efficient, and the results will be null — or at most, very modest and, what is even more serious, not sustainable.

Our countries must answer these crucial questions, and the institutional machinery of the international community must support us actively in this endeavour.

The Acting President *(spoke in Arabic)*: I now give the floor to Ms. Myrna Pitt, Chief Executive Officer of the Central Housing and Planning Authority of Guyana.

Ms. Pitt (Guyana): On behalf of the Government of Guyana, allow me at the outset to express our warm congratulations on the excellent chairing of this meeting, which is certainly ensuring that our debates are constructive, and that they lead to action-oriented programmes.

It has been five years since the Istanbul Declaration was endorsed by participants at the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat). That Conference, we recall, was notable not only for the high quality of the debates which characterized it, but also for the very high level of participation by non-governmental organizations, city mayors and municipal authorities in the work of the Conference. The City Summit, as it was then known, was more than an intergovernmental summit; it was a meeting of all stakeholders, peoples and their representatives, who endorsed the Habitat Agenda: "adequate shelter for all" and "the development of sustainable human settlements".

Over the past five years, the Government of Guyana has fashioned programmes and interventions in the settlements sector which targeted low-income households and households in unplanned settlements as primary beneficiaries. To this end, approximately 91 settlements were established, making 50,000 house lots available to persons with pressing shelter needs. Indeed, a central pillar of the Government of Guyana's housing programme has been the provision of house lots, with basic services, to the dispossessed; the rehabilitation of existing infrastructure; and the regularization of unplanned settlements.

Our achievements, however, could have been much greater in a more enabling international environment — one that allowed Guyana to obtain fair prices for its main exports of sugar, rice and gold. As the Assembly is aware, the prices of those commodities have fallen in recent years, but our efforts to ensure that the right of shelter is affordable to all Guyanese, in a progressive manner and within the limits of our budgetary strictures, have had an impact on the reduction of poverty in our country.

Today Guyana is working with its development partners to ensure that our country is no longer burdened by external debt. This has entailed close negotiations with creditor nations and the international financial institutions, and has enabled Guyana to complete work on its Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. The strategy is an expression of the Government's strong commitment to reducing poverty within the context of accelerated economic growth and improved social conditions. As a Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Debt Initiative country, we are working hard to ensure that Guyana's poverty strategy is nationally owned and that it is representative of the wishes of our people, meeting in particular the aspirations of the poorest for improved living standards and a better quality of life. Consultations with our partners and with a variety of civil society groups are currently ongoing. An earlier period of consultations on Guyana's development path led to the publication last year of the country's National Development Strategy. In these consultations, one element appears clear: the right of shelter is of paramount importance and cannot be overemphasized. It is important for the achievement of our development aspirations, and, indeed, it has emerged as an important platform for urban stability in the past few months.

The National Development Strategy is the framework within which programmes and projects will be implemented, with the primary focus being to

improve the quality of life of the nation's citizens. It embraces all groups and seeks to bring about equity.

Another important element in these consultations, in the National Development Strategy and in the finalization of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper has been the very clear links between shelter policy and other aspects of a balanced development strategy. From Guyana's perspective, the right to shelter involves the development of security of tenure for the population: urban, rural and hinterland. It also involves the desire of all Guyanese for improved governance in urban areas, in the management of municipal budgets, and in the collection of taxes and other dues that make urban government possible.

An important issue that has also arisen in our national consultations is the right of urban dwellers to a decent standard of living. For urbanization means more than the provision of shelter: it also means the creation, through partnerships between government, municipal authorities, civil society and the private sector, of an environment in which all can find decent employment that meets rising expectations for a better life. In addition to the Government's shelter strategy, consideration is being given to the strengthening of public-private sector partnerships in settlements development. Emphasis is also being placed on empowering communities and on promoting an enabling environment to intensify and accelerate housing development for low-income groups.

Guyana supports the Declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium. We have based our shelter policy on a participatory approach, integrating housing and shelter with the provision of development opportunities for the poor, especially women, who make up the large majority of the urban poor in the informal economy. Local authorities are being strengthened through the support of our development partners and have their say in the determination not only of development policy within their areas, but also in the national Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Guyana is pleased to support the Habitat Agenda as part of its comprehensive development policy. But we are constrained in our action. Unplanned settlements formation is increasing faster than we are able to upgrade these settlements and provide adequate housing. Our constraint is neither lack of will nor the lack of imagination to envision a future of prosperity for all Guyanese. Our constraint is in the international marketplace, where the continuing decline in our terms of trade means that less will be available to meet the urgent needs of our peoples. The international community has been a solid partner of Guyana, but development resources are in short supply. We are therefore convinced that success on the Habitat Agenda is intimately linked to success on the agenda of the forthcoming International Conference on Financing for Development.

Greater efficiency in our development resources is important. We also need capacity-building to enable us to utilize in a better fashion the modest but effective resources of our domestic private sector. Most of all, we need open markets and greater investment in Guyana to enable us to stand proudly at the next Habitat conference and demonstrate our achievements in meeting the goals of this Agenda.

The examples we have reviewed in the course of this special session and the ambitious programmes of international development organizations such as the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) allow us to envision a future of adequate shelter for all – a future of prosperity for urban and rural dwellers. Guyana is committed to this future and invites all development partners, bilateral and multilateral, to accompany our country on its road to development.

The Acting President *(spoke in Arabic)*: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Jorge Lara-Castro, Chairman of the delegation of Paraguay.

Mr. Lara-Castro (Paraguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): The delegation of the Republic of Paraguay is deeply honoured to participate in this very important gathering devoted to the review of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, which was adopted at the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), held at Istanbul in 1996. I can assure the Assembly of our determination and our resolve to work to achieve the specific objectives to which we deeply aspire and to those which we have committed ourselves.

At the Istanbul Summit, it became clear that the urbanization process, particularly in the developing world, poses a major challenge to most of the countries on the planet. Paraguay has been affected by this phenomenon and has faced this challenge through the

speedy formulation of new national strategies, always bearing in mind the values enshrined in our national Constitution and guided by the principles set out in the Habitat Agenda.

According to current demographic indices, it is estimated that in the year 2005 57 per cent of the population of Paraguay, more than 6 million persons, will be living in urban areas. Similarly, it is estimated that the urbanization rate will remain high in the coming years, to such a point that by 2025, two thirds of the population will live in urban areas, probably strongly concentrated in the major centres, such as the capital and a few other important cities.

Given this demographic situation, the prevailing economic model has been enable to meet growing social demands. On the contrary, it has led to a considerable increase in general and extreme poverty, both in rural and in urban areas. Approximately 1.8 million inhabitants are currently living in poverty. The urbanization process has also brought great pressure to bear on the natural resources of the country and on its environment, and it has clearly increased negative effects in these areas.

As an essential tool for dealing with urbanization challenges, a new assessment has been made of the State's role in providing basic necessities, including a governmental decentralization initiative that facilitates local administration and the distribution of important resources. Currently, health and education services, communications, transportation, infrastructure and industry are concentrated in the capital, Asunción. Under these conditions, a large percentage of the population lack services and opportunities for their development and well-being. Decentralization and reform are essential tools for better distribution and administration.

Another important objective is the inclusion and integration into the country's housing agenda of the groups that run the greatest risk of being marginalized. The main factors associated with the lack of social integration in Paraguay fall within the urban-rural context, language, age, gender and ethnic status.

It should also be mentioned that all housing initiatives are carried out in full respect of the environment, incorporating the principles enshrined in Agenda 21.

Undoubtedly, poverty, which has grown and worsened rapidly in recent years, is the main obstacle to the successful implementation of national housing strategies, as well as to all economic and social initiatives. A major cause has been the expansion of market relations on an unequal distribution structure for resources, such as land and credits; for income, such as salary and agricultural prices; and for opportunities, such as education, health, housing and employment. Another cause of poverty is the expansion of speculative activities, particularly financial and fiduciary activities. External factors have also contributed to the worsening of poverty.

The Government of Paraguay has made various efforts to overcome poverty. A national structural reform process has been initiated to that end, beginning with the national Constitution, and has included the adoption of a series of legal norms. The entry into force of tax reform laws and labour legislation, as well as the new penal code and penal procedures, must also be emphasized, without overlooking the law on the privatization of State enterprises and the law on capital markets. Also worth noting is the creation of many institutions engaged in social work and development, such as the Secretariat for Social Accion, the Secretariat for Women, a sub-Ministry of Youth and, particularly, the Secretariat for State Reform and the Secretariat for the Environment.

Also to be mentioned is the important initiative to foster the establishment of public/private organizations, geared towards supporting productive employment opportunities and the noteworthy work carried out by the National Housing Savings and Loans Bank and the National Housing Council in planning and executing national strategies in housing priorities.

International cooperation is a vital factor for the successful implementation of the national agenda and the achievement of fundamental objectives set forth in the Government programme through the economic and social strategic plan. International cooperation must give priority to administrative and economic decentralization, State reform, the incorporation of the marginal sectors, the productive process and the classification of human resources. The priorities for establishing international cooperation for human settlements are the drafts of laws, territorial arrangement, urban development, support for intermediary cities, protection and cleaning up of the

environment, improvement of traffic and transport thoroughfares, education, health and housing.

Finally, Paraguay reaffirms its commitments made in the Habitat Agenda, but it also encourages the international community and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements to continue the search for new strategies and resources to confront future challenges.

The Acting President *(spoke in Arabic)*: I give the floor to Mr. Jamal Al-Bader, representative of Qatar.

Mr. Al-Bader (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am pleased to extend to the President, on behalf of my delegation, our congratulations on his presiding over the General Assembly at its twenty-fifth special session, on the comprehensive review and appraisal outcome of second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II).

This conference is taking place five years after our last meeting in Istanbul, which took place in June 1996. We are meeting to evaluate our implementation of the recommendations of that Conference. We should ask ourselves if we have provided adequate shelter for all, within each country's potential. Have we established clean human settlements away from the crowding and tumult of urbanized areas, as provided for in the recommendations of the Conference? The answer is no. We still see a large percentage of homeless people, particularly in developing countries.

More than 1 billion people are still living in inadequate housing, with very limited services or, at times, none at all. More than 100 million people, most in developing countries, are also displaced or homeless. These are painful numbers, particularly when we see that the international community cannot reduce the percentage of those who still lack the most basic services and who are still homeless.

Given the poverty and the declining living standards in many countries, and their Governments' inability to respond to demand, particularly in remote village and rural areas, we are witnessing reverse migration of population towards large cities, in search of a better life. This trend, of course, places more pressure on the service sector as urbanization has become more acute in developing countries. Approximately 40 per cent of the population live in cities, and, regrettably, the number is increasing.

Regarding the implementation of the outcome of Habitat II, which took place in Istanbul, Qatar, since the discovery and production of oil in the country, has done everything to take care of its population, providing a dignified life and prosperity for the Qataris. This includes the provision of adequate housing for citizens, in accordance with the most modern architectural designs for family homes. The State also implements housing projects for senior government officials, low-income families, the elderly and orphans. One of our most important achievements was the building in 1998 of 340 low-income housing units and the granting of 413 lots and 20 million riyals to the benefit of 380 citizens. Some 4,200 housing units, costing approximately QR2.2 billion, have been provided for state employees, while some additional 900 units have been built in accordance with the highest environmental standards, at a cost of QR495 million. Some 8,000 additional citizens will receive housing units within the next three years.

In this context, the Qatari Government provides interest-free loans for housing construction. These loans may be paid off over a long period and are thus no burden to the families receiving them. In many instances, outstanding payments on these loans are forgiven by royal decree when the borrower is unable to make them.

The draft declaration to be adopted at the end of this session states that

> "We further resolve to seriously address the challenges posed by wars, conflicts, refugees and human-made disasters on human settlements, and commit ourselves through enhanced international cooperation mechanisms to support post-conflict and post-disaster countries, with special emphasis on the provision of shelter and other basic services, particularly to vulnerable groups, refugees and internally displaced persons, as well as to facilitate restoring security of tenure and property rights." (*A/S-25/2, sect. VII.C, decision 2/1, para. 53*)

In this context, I wish to recall the situation of the displaced Palestinian people, whose lands in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip have been occupied by Israel since 1967. Their circumstances are very germane to the issue of adequate housing under discussion. Illegal settlements are being built on the occupied territories, further exacerbating the already complex problem in

the Middle East. We therefore call on Israel to halt the building of settlements so that everyone throughout the region can live in security, stability and peace.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Kishore Mahbubani, Chairman of the delegation of Singapore.

Mr. Mahbubani (Singapore): By our rough count, this Assembly has already heard over 160 speeches at this Istanbul +5 session. Most of the major points have been made. We live in an urbanized world. Two hundred years ago, only 2 per cent of the world's population lived in urban areas. Today, more than 50 per cent of the world's 6 billion people do so. Unfortunately, 1 billion of these are housed in slums or squatter communities. Fifty years ago, metropolitan New York was the only urban centre with a population of more than 10 million; today, there are 19 such cities. During the same 50-year period, the number of cities with more than 1 million inhabitants increased more than fourfold from 80 to 365.

Singapore is one of these cities. We therefore believe that the most helpful contribution we can make at this late stage of our discussion is to briefly describe our own experience in urban management. There is a common romantic view that city living is inevitably inferior to rural life — less healthy, less happy, less morally grounded, more isolated, more selfish and more dangerous. We have done our best to prove this conventional wisdom wrong.

Singapore is the most densely populated country in the world. We are also, probably, the world's only city State. On a small island of only 680 square kilometres, we have to provide homes for 4 million people. Therefore, at the beginning of our existence as an independent State, it was decided that housing had to be a priority of the new Government. We initiated a major building programme, which continues in modified form today and will probably never be terminated. At present, about 86 per cent of our population now live in public housing, principally apartment blocks in discrete housing estates, while the remainder live in private housing. Among the residents of public housing, 92 per cent own their homes, while the remainder live in subsidized rented accommodations.

This high percentage of residence in public housing — which in Singapore's case, incidentally, always means Government-built housing — has made it necessary for us to pay great attention to the standards and conditions of public housing. To encourage home ownership, for example, Singapore developed a compulsory social security saving scheme, the Central Provident Fund scheme, which enables workers to buy their own homes. Home ownership has made each citizen a stakeholder in the nation's development and gives everyone a strong interest in both social harmony and a healthy physical environment. As our population has grown and developed, we have tried to adapt our policies to take changing attitudes and needs into account. Housing estates are now designed with all the necessities and amenities of daily life and we have tried to encourage some industries and firms to relocate away from the city centre, so as to achieve a more balanced distribution of settlement and employment within our territory.

Singapore is also probably the most land-scarce country in the world, relative to its population. To ensure optimum utilization of land, Singapore has a land-use blueprint called the Concept Plan. First developed in 1971, this Concept Plan is reviewed once every 10 years to keep up with changing trends and aspirations of the people. The current review is expected to be completed in late 2001. From the Concept Plan, the planning intention for individual plots of land is translated into a detailed Master Plan. The Master Plan is reviewed and updated every five years.

However, we are acutely aware that, in any society, there exists a bottom 5 to 10 per cent of low-income earners who need assistance in housing. Singapore's public housing authority, the Housing Development Board, has an array of housing-assistance schemes designed to give the lower-income groups a chance for upward mobility, including housing subsidies to help lower-income households own their first home. For instance, the authority buys flats back from the open market to sell to poorer families at subsidized prices and allows its tenants to purchase their rented apartments at a discount proportional to their duration of tenancy.

Singapore's housing programme began and continues out of necessity. Because of the environmental constraint of a large population relative to available land area, we have always had to take an active approach to urban planning. Laissez-faire has never been an option for us. The constraints that we

face, however, have also had their positive side. Since we lack a hinterland, the problem of rural migration to urban areas is not a difficulty that we have had to face. Our small land area has made the management and control of our environment easier. Feedback from our population is immediate and problems can be identified and dealt with relatively quickly.

In conclusion, because of our unique and peculiar circumstances, we could never presume to suggest that our own experience could be a viable model for larger cities and countries. In the case of smaller-scale urban environments, however, we may have some valuable experience to share, not least in avoiding the many errors and problems that we have made and encountered along the way. The management of urban environments can never be more than a work in progress. Practices and policies have to evolve along with the individuals and the society that they serve. Adaptability, determination, perseverance and the careful husbanding of resources will continue to be our watchwords in this endeavour.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I give the floor to Mr. Norberto Walter Pazos, Under-Secretary for Urban Planning and Housing, Ministry of Infrastructure and Housing of Argentina.

Mr. Pazos (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, I should like to express my pleasure at having the opportunity to represent my country, the Argentine Republic, in the General Assembly during this special session to review and appraise the implementation of the Habitat Agenda agreed to in Istanbul in 1996. The world Conference on Human Settlements, which took place in that city, set out a relevant framework that enabled us to become acquainted with and organize the important work that was being undertaken in this area throughout the world.

I should like to emphasize that, in my country in the 1950s, we included in the national Constitution the explicit right to housing for all the inhabitants of the country, and that right was ratified in the last amendment to that document. The recommendations made in Istanbul provide an incontestable set of guidelines for the formulation of specific policies for the sector that deals with settlements.

Being responsible for elaborating and implementing such policies, I should like to take this opportunity to give a brief account of the ground covered by Argentina, as a signatory to the document adopted during the Istanbul Conference, in fulfilling our commitments.

There have been favourable developments in security of tenure and access to land, housing and basic services in the Argentine Republic. Indeed, with regard to conditions of tenure, the recent trend has been favourable: the percentage of households living in conditions of insecure tenure has dropped from 17.6 per cent in 1991 to the current figure of 16.7 per cent.

As for the right to access to housing, the number of housing units funded by the National Housing Fund increased from 27,000 to 53,000 a year between 1990 and 2000. An important factor in this increase was the decentralization of that Fund towards the provincial governments.

Although public activities in the area of housing have increased, there has been only a slight improvement in the housing situation as compared with the situation in the past. Indeed, according to recent estimates, the percentage of households suffering from an "absolute deficit" — households living in derelict buildings or sharing with another household — has decreased from 12.1 per cent to 9.3 per cent.

In order to focus specifically on that segment of the population, in 1996 the Government embarked on a programme for the improvement of housing and basic infrastructure to help those with low incomes who are not in a position to obtain funds from the National Housing Fund. The aim of that programme is to make adequate provision for housing needs and strengthen and develop social planning, the productive and technological sectors, employment among members of such households, and groups acting on behalf of the target population.

With regard to designing and deploying innovative financing methods, in the mid-1990s the real estate market began to expand quickly, and legislation was adopted to encourage the provision and expansion of resources destined for construction and real estate activity. Furthermore, mortgage availability was increased to make it easier for sectors previously excluded from such financial means to gain access to them.

The use of international credits from the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank in support of basic infrastructure and equipment, in particular programmes for municipal financing and

for the support of privatized water and sanitation services, has resulted in a significant increase in coverage for the population.

In an attempt to deal with the housing deficit, the Government of Argentina is working to develop programmes aimed at improving the quality of housing for the lowest-income sectors and ensuring a reduction in the cost of the housing units that are built so as to increase productivity and obtain a greater yield from the limited budgetary resources, thereby enabling people with more limited economic capacity to gain access to housing.

In this context, the national Government has embarked on a low-cost housing programme that is producing housing units that cost less than $9,000, with repayment rates set at about $25 a month. These units are well-designed and built of good-quality materials. This ongoing project will contribute to the solution of the housing problem. We are attempting to use appropriate technology adapted to local conditions in this project, including in terms of the materials used.

I should now like to emphasize some particular aspects of other measures that have been adopted as part of the housing policy currently being implemented. Decentralization is being emphasized and local government strengthened in order to optimize the use of resources and ensure the implementation of programmes. We are according importance to land planning and the need to make progress in the creation of local land funds that, by promoting social equity, can help to prevent the spontaneous migration that is resulting from changes taking place in the country because of globalization and the prevailing form of economic development. We are also working to include environmental considerations in urban policy.

We believe that a State housing policy must necessarily provide for continuity in order to ensure the efficient fulfilment of the programme goals. Our country can assure the Assembly that the main programme objectives are shared by the principal political parties, despite understandable differences in other fields. Our Government has also been developing a policy of openness and consultation with all those involved in activities relating to settlements so that we can learn about their opinions, proposals and creative initiatives in the search for appropriate ways of finding solutions for people.

The guidelines adopted by the national Government in order to improve competitiveness will certainly help to increase housing construction. We are convinced that the secondary role played by the State in helping to provide a solution to the main problems of settlements for all will continue to help the many sectors of the population that are unable to overcome their poverty and exclusion so that they can gain access to a better quality of life and enable them to look to the future with hope.

We would like to support the request made by the Minister of Housing of Panama to include in the report on the special session the Declaration of Santiago with regard to the updating of the regional plan for the countries of Latin American and the Caribbean.

In conclusion, we would like to reaffirm the will of Argentina, as expressed in Istanbul, to work towards the fulfilment of the recommendations made at that meeting, to which we will certainly contribute through our analysis and evaluation, as well as what we have learned from this special session.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ahmed El-Atrash, Chairman of the delegation of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

Mr. El-Atrash (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) *(spoke in Arabic)*: It is a great honour for me to represent my country at this very important session to review progress in the implementation of the outcome of the Istanbul Conference and the Habitat Agenda.

I wish first of all to stress that, in any society, shelter is among the fundamental issues related to sustainable development. Shelter is something that individuals and households need; it can have either a positive or a negative effect on a society's socio-economic situation; it is a factor in determining the urban fabric of any society, in conjunction with the services provided by the society in question. Rehabilitation of cities and the improvement of the environment are a complex issue that must be addressed to attain a sustainable social system and an economic environment in which it will be possible to bring about changes that revolve around the human being.

The challenge we face here is not merely a technical one. It relates also to empowering people to enjoy a better life. Human beings are God's mirror on

Earth; they are the instrument, motor and purpose of development. Thus, Libya's policies emphasize that shelter is key to sustainable human development. Adequate shelter consistent with respect for human dignity and promoting self-esteem is a fundamental human right. Our policies have been supplemented by the adoption of a number of laws on the provision of adequate shelter for all. We have adopted a long-term housing plan consistent with our policy of economic restructuring. Here, we have set up credit and financing programmes and have invited and encouraged financial institutions, private-sector entities and individuals to provide needed funding. We have also put in place direct funding for housing for low-income groups. We have concentrated not only on the quantitative side, but are also taking account of qualitative elements in urban, rural and desert areas.

Let me now speak of our comprehensive health strategy. We have set up a national programme of free comprehensive preventive health-care services. We have done what is necessary on the legislative, management and organizational levels to provide nutrition services, housing, environmental protection, sanitation, drinking water, sewage facilities, waste disposal and food inspection, industrial safety, among other services, along with developing national capacity in those areas.

To increase social integration and strengthen our support for vulnerable groups, we have formulated a human-resources development policy aimed at attaining sustainable development through a comprehensive approach. In Libya, as in other societies, city dwellers account for a majority of the population, in our case 85.4 per cent. Per capita income averages $8,100. Individual income has grown thanks to all the free social services that are provided, such as free education, free health care, free housing and free or cheap energy. The supply of jobs is high, and our unemployment rate is lower than 5 per cent. We have a comprehensive social security system along with a variety of subsidies, including for food, education, housing, et cetera.

On the question of gender, we have taken a number of radical steps to empower women to attain their rights as effective participants in society. Women fully enjoy their rights, such as inheritance and ownership of capital and movable assets such as land and real estate. Those rights were established by almighty God in the holy Koran. In 1964, women's participation in the economic activities of our society was less than 4.15 per cent; as of mid-1995 it had risen to 14.52 per cent. The percentage of women in schools at various levels is about 50 per cent.

We have prepared a country report on these matters, which will be distributed in due course. The report covers shelter, social development, poverty eradication, environmental planning, economic growth, good governance, decentralization and international cooperation.

All these achievements have been possible in spite of the unjust sanctions imposed by the Security Council in 1992 and the unilateral sanctions imposed by the United States of America in violation of all international instruments and United Nations resolutions.

Here, I would mention also the importance of the issue of the landmines that remain from the Second World War. These are found in large areas of Libya and prevent us from harnessing our own agricultural, forestry, grazing and underground water resources, among others. They have also caused the death or disability of hundreds of citizens. We continue to appeal to the world's conscience to help us remove those mines. We were extremely happy at the recent agreement between my country and Italy, by which Italy promised to help demine these areas and to provide compensation for their inhabitants.

Yesterday, the representative of the Zionist entity launched an indiscriminate attack, using hateful language about "terrorism" and accusing the victims themselves of being terrorists — while it is his Zionist entity that is based on State terrorism. It is there that weapons of mass destruction and settler policies are used. Let me remind the representative of the Zionist entity of the massacres his country has committed. Perhaps he will recall the destruction of the King David Hotel and the Deir Yassin, Sabra and Shatilla and Qana massacres. To date, his country has refused to provide compensation for the victims of those massacres. That is in addition, of course, to the Zionist entity's scorched earth policy, as epitomized by the killing of children, women and old people and by the destruction of houses, farmland and infrastructure in order to replace the original inhabitants with new settlers. That is why we were extremely surprised to hear that representative say what he said.

Since we want to support Habitat and United Nations principles, we invite the international community to take the necessary steps to help put an end to the Israeli occupation of occupied Palestine, including Holy Quds, and to provide the Palestinian people with the assistance it requires for implementation of the Istanbul Declaration.

My country is striving hard to play its part in the field of sustainable development, including in economic, social and capacity-building areas, so that we can be part of the international effort to achieve our goals and serve our citizens. We shall cooperate with all concerned parties on the regional and international levels to achieve comprehensive sustainable development. I am confident that the cooperative spirit prevailing here at this special session will be conducive to the creation of new principles and the charting of new, safe roads enabling us to achieve our goals in this millennium.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Nathanon Thavisin, Deputy Permanent Secretary of Bangkok Metropolitan Administration of Thailand.

Ms. Thavisin (Thailand): I have the honour to share with you, on behalf of the Thai delegation, information on Thailand's progress in implementing the Habitat Agenda since the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) in 1996. Thailand has experienced rapid urbanization, with a current urbanization rate of 38 per cent of the total population. Such rapid urban growth adversely affects human settlements by creating many economic, social and environmental problems.

The Thai Government has initiated and implemented a number of policy measures in order to fulfil the Habitat Agenda goals of achieving adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements. It has established the National Urban Development Committee, one of the major assignments of which is to monitor the overall implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

With respect to the goal of adequate shelter for all, Thailand recently achieved a country-wide home ownership rate as high as 80 per cent — that rate is 56 per cent in Bangkok — with the collaboration of both the public and private sectors and of partnerships. The Thai Government will further implement its home ownership strategy through such key agencies as the National Housing Authority and the Government Housing Bank. Moreover, the Thai Government has established a Community Organizations Development Institute as part of a governmental mechanism to alleviate poverty by supporting communities in terms of technical knowledge and funding in order to realize community empowerment.

A liveable and healthy community is our priority objective in the development of human settlements. The Thai Government has undertaken necessary measures to strengthen the social foundation and promote equal distribution of economic benefits within the society. His Majesty the King's philosophy of "Sufficient Economy", which suggests a moderate way of living, has been followed and has become the key strategy for sustainable development and the well-being of the Thai people. This development approach will promote people as the centre of development.

With respect to environmental management, we are introducing measures that encourage local authorities to make their own decisions on environmental land use and city planning and on their implementation. The liveable and healthy city initiative has been carried out successfully by the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, which has helped the city of Bangkok to rise from the twenty-sixth place to thirteenth in the ranks of the most liveable cities in Asia. This was done under the auspices of the Bangkok development programme contained in Bangkok's Agenda 21 plan, whose key principles, goals and indicators for sustainable development involve significant support to maximize the involvement and participation of local communities in our policy-making and cooperative efforts, in order to improve the quality of life.

Through our partners, which Thailand calls civil society participants, many different programmes and measures of good governance have been put into practice. The involvement and participation of civil society is guaranteed by law in all of these processes and procedures, because it shows that such partnership is vital to building the consensus required to achieve civic development. The infrastructures cover economic, environmental, health and other types of development, and sustainable growth.

Thailand supports decentralization. The new Thai Constitution, which was promulgated in 1997, provides important roles and duties for local authorities and

more public participation in the governmental administration, thus leading to good governance. As the head of the Thai delegation, I appreciate the significance of the draft declaration on cities and human settlements in the new millennium. The dedicatory paragraphs also relate to support for the consideration and protection of the family as the basic unit of society, as well as to the importance of the family in planning, development and management of human settlements. I also appreciate the significance of decentralization for the decision-making process and transparency on the part of public authorities, and I fully support the paragraphs speaking about the law of sustainable development.

Thailand is preparing its Ninth National Economic and Social Development Plan, a five-year development plan that will cover the period from 2002 to 2006. The Ninth Plan's Restructuring Strategy for Sustainable Rural-Urban Development identifies key issues to be addressed in order to improve the standard of living and quality of life of the Thai people in both rural and urban areas. It will emphasize the empowerment of communities and civil society in rural and urban development, rural and urban poverty reduction, strengthened rural and urban linkage and rural development, and urban competitiveness and liveability, as well as area-based collaborative planning. To ensure sustainable rural and urban development, we need to strengthen rural areas as effective agents of poverty reduction and urban areas as key engines of economic competitiveness and growth.

My delegation would like me to urge the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS) to play a more active role in supporting the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, especially in the Asia-Pacific region, which is a vast region with more than 60 per cent of the world's population. We also recognize the important role of regional commissions, in particular the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, in assisting their members, as well as in promoting regional cooperation in the areas of urban and rural development and human settlements.

Since international funding for human settlement development programmes is declining, it is essential for us to investigate innovative ways and means of international cooperation. In this connection, there are a number of institutions in Thailand, in particular the Centre for Housing and Human Settlements Studies of the National Housing Authority, the Housing Information and Research Department of the Government Housing Bank, and the Community Organizations Development Institute, which stand ready to cooperate with other Habitat Agenda partners. However, there are many more United Nations bodies that collaborate and work with Thailand under Habitat, such as the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Environment Programme, the Secretariat's Department for Economic and Social Affairs, and various non-governmental organizations.

I am also pleased to inform the Assembly that Thailand is going to host the Fifth Congress of the Regional Network of Local Authorities for the Management of Human Settlements, or CityNet, from 28 October to 3 November this year in Bangkok.

Finally, allow me to reiterate Thailand's firm commitment to enhancing the implementation of the Habitat Agenda and to enhancing international support and cooperation at every level in Thailand. Our down-to-earth approach — or, as my friend from Indonesia said, being truly sincere in action — will enable us to implement this Habitat Agenda.

I would like to say to all United Nations Members that I refuse to use the word "no". I am opposed to there being only talk, and never action. We should commit ourselves to take action and to enjoy working together as partners in support of the continuing implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

I could not conclude my statement without emphasizing the need to empower women, as I myself was fully supported by my local government to rise to my present position. The policy goal of every country should include gender equity — that is, the involvement of women and men and giving attention to issues of concern to both. In addition, the gap between women and men should be narrowed, as should be the gap confronting vulnerable groups — children, the elderly and the disabled — and the gap between rich and poor. We cannot achieve success without helping the least developed countries. I therefore request all Habitat partners here to make a greater effort to work with sincere minds, to take action and to increase participation, in order to serve as a driving force for the improvement and development of human settlements worldwide in the twenty-first century.

The Acting President *(spoke in Arabic)*: I now give the floor to Mr. Tõnis Kõiv, Vice-Chairman of the delegation of Estonia.

Mr. Kõiv (Estonia): It is a great pleasure to participate in this meeting devoted to the fifth birthday of the Conference on Human Settlements held in Istanbul. I believe that this forum serves a useful function in providing participants with an opportunity to discuss in an open-minded and friendly setting questions related to issues that are of concern to everyone.

We fully support the statement made by the Minister of Housing of Sweden, who spoke on behalf of the European Union, and Estonia agrees with the principles outlined therein. In this short presentation I am going to try to define some of the issues and indicate the role of local governments in the elaboration and implementation of housing policy in Estonia. Particular attention will be paid to current trends with regard to the prognosis for developments in housing policies in the immediate future.

On the national level the development of housing policy in Estonia is the concern of the Ministry of Economic Affairs. The Minister is responsible for arranging for the involvement of different stakeholders in the policy-making process. As a matter of principle, representatives of both the private and voluntary sectors are included in the development of policies. The main principles of the housing sector are to guarantee affordable dwellings, to increase the administrative capacity of the third sector and to specify public functions and improve the efficiency of legislation on the basis of the Development Plan for Estonian Housing to 2010. The plan was developed by a broad-based expert committee, but it has not yet been approved by the Parliament.

The central Government develops overall housing policy, collects and analyses statistical materials, informs the public about the situation in the housing sector and about regional differences, helps guide the privatization process, monitors housing policy implementation and facilitates the renovation or establishment of dwellings by residents. The interest on housing loans is totally tax-free.

The Board of Consumer Protection should also be mentioned. Its task is to protect the legal rights of consumers and to speak on behalf of these rights. The law on local government arrangements stipulates that local authorities are responsible for local development plans, the management and administration of local housing policies, drinking water and sewage systems, the commonweal, street cleaning, land-use planning and the coordination and monitoring of construction activities.

In addition, local authorities are responsible for arranging the overall administration of the municipal dwelling stock. Its financing is arranged as follows. Municipalities finance commonweal expenses, street cleaning, maintenance and repair work and the maintenance of street lighting systems. Consumers finance everyday repair work and the renovation of dwellings, drinking water and sewage. Voluntary organizations have been authorized to administer and maintain dwellings, in particular via apartment associations.

One noteworthy trend is that the share of non-profit dwelling associations is predicted to increase. Representatives of the non-profit sector are actively participating in the legislative process. It is difficult to define clearly the division of roles in the private sector as compared to other sectors. The role of the private sector in housing policy today is characterized by the provision of financial services, including special affordable loans. In the real estate business, the private sector's share of maintenance activities is increasing. Nevertheless, in the larger cities, municipal enterprises still account for a remarkable share of this work.

The role of arranging for housing today in Estonia is mostly allocated to local authorities. When comparing the functions of the public, non-profit and private sectors, one can see that the dwelling stock and municipal real-estate maintenance businesses are being privatized with notable rapidity, and this trend is predicted to continue in the future.

As an example of the national housing policy, I would like to note the tax relief provided in relation to interest payments for loans for housing or dwellings. This programme is considered to be a clear indicator of the Estonian national approach to solving housing problems, and thus this programme involves the direct implementation of the Habitat Agenda's principles.

In observing the allocation of functions between the public and private sectors, a direct conclusion can be drawn — namely, the public sector's share is decreasing in every part of the housing sector. This

trend is supported by the national policy's clear support for the non-profit sector.

In order to implement the Habitat Agenda, to guarantee adequate shelter for all and develop sustainable human settlements in an urbanizing world, the Republic of Estonia has chosen to increase the role of its residents so as to implement the principles of the Habitat Agenda.

The Acting President *(spoke in Arabic)*: I now give the floor to Mr. Atoki Ileka, the Chairman of the delegation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Ileka (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): It is an honour for my delegation to address the General Assembly at this special session devoted to the review and appraisal of the Habitat Agenda.

My delegation would like to congratulate the President and all the members of the Bureau on their brilliant election and on the organization of this important event, which is already serving as a significant symbol and making a substantial contribution to human development. As our work is drawing to a close, our thoughts go out to all those women and men who stepped forward, doing their best to make it possible to hold these meetings. My delegation would like in particular to congratulate the Secretary-General and the Executive Director of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) and all their staff for the high quality of the preparatory work and for the efforts they made to provide delegations with a pleasant and suitable working atmosphere.

My country played an active part in the Istanbul Conference on Human Settlements. There it endorsed the universal objectives related to guaranteeing adequate housing to all and the attainment of the objective of ensuring the development of human settlements that are more secure, healthy, livable, equitable, sustainable and productive.

With respect to the question under consideration by the Assembly, the absence of peace in my country has been one of the major obstacles to the implementation of the 1996 Habitat Agenda.

The poor results to date in this sector are but one of the direct consequences of the multifaceted crisis that has been gripping my country for more than a decade — a crisis that is greatly exacerbated by the war of aggression that has been waged against the Democratic Republic of the Congo since August 1998.

I should like here to take this opportunity to thank and pay warm tribute to Secretary-General Kofi Annan and the international community as a whole for their tireless efforts to re-establish a lasting peace in my country.

My Government, which hopes and believes that peace will be restored very soon, has elaborated — with the assistance of the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements — a national plan of action for human settlements whose short-term priorities will be the reconstruction of those structures that were destroyed; the relocation of disaster victims and the homeless; the revitalization of urban poverty zones; and the strengthening of the capacities of local populations through the establishment of the training and facilitation structures necessary to create an enabling environment.

The implementation of this plan requires considerable funding, which the Republic of the Congo cannot, unfortunately, provide by itself because of its current situation. That is why my Government is launching an urgent appeal to the international community to commit itself, in a spirit of international solidarity and at a scale commensurate with existing needs, to help the Democratic Republic of the Congo to attain the minimum objectives that it has set itself and to provide the Congolese the right to a better life, which they have been denied these many long years. This should be done in particular through a resumption of consistent structural cooperation, both multilateral and bilateral, and access to the various mechanisms for debt alleviation, including the modalities available to countries emerging from armed conflict in the framework of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Debt Initiative.

Over the long term, the national human settlements action plan advocates the following series of actions.

As regards housing development, my Government will be putting into effect appropriate policies for the promotion of local building materials, the expansion of rental housing, and the establishment of mechanisms and structures for the financing of housing.

Turning now to sustainable urban development, the many deaths caused by the torrential rain last month in Kinshasa served as a wake-up call to my Government regarding the urgency of dealing with this question. The elaboration of sound land-use policies is now under way, and these will be crucial.

The development of institutional capacities represents another important aspect of the plan. My Government is now organizing training and retraining seminars. Studies are also being carried out with a view to the establishment of a national human settlements monitoring agency, a school of urban planning and land management, and the reform of structures for urban planning and urban management.

Lastly, the Democratic Republic of the Congo intends to resume international cooperation in this field, in particular through the establishment of partnerships with public and private institutions for the development of real estate and the transfer of appropriate building technologies; the resumption and continuation of relations with the United Nations system in the framework of strengthening the capacity to fight against poverty; and through a revitalization of structural cooperation to support the promotion of human settlements in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

In conclusion, my delegation wishes to assure the Assembly that my Government commits itself to the full implementation of the recommendations we will be adopting at the conclusion of this session, which will guide our future work.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Basile Ikouebe, Chairman of the delegation of the Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Ikouebe (Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): It is in a constructive spirit, and feeling very hopeful about the outcome of our current discussions, that my delegation is participating in this session devoted to the review of the implementation of the global plan of action adopted at Istanbul five years ago.

The delegation of the Congo believes that this session gives us the opportunity to send out a strong signal in favour of a key aspect of human development: the right to housing and the right to adequate shelter for all.

After a grim period of civil war, which caused the massive destruction of the social infrastructure, housing, school and hospitals, and led to the massive displacement of peoples, my Government would like to seize this opportunity to reaffirm its full support for the message of Istanbul as well as its commitment to be guided by the principles therein in order to implement the programme of rehabilitation, reconstruction and development that was adopted.

The growing level of urbanization in the world has not bypassed the Congo, 70 per cent of whose population is concentrated in urban areas, mainly in the two main cities — 40 per cent in the capital, Brazzaville, and 20 per cent in Pointe-Noire. We must manage this trend in order to minimize its attendant risks.

The strategy for human settlements development in the Congo has four aspects: security of tenure, adequate shelter for all, the promotion of equal access to credit, and essential urban services for the populations involved.

The principles underlying our policies can be summed up as follows: the preparation of an adequate institutional, regulatory and legislative framework for the development of human settlements; the improvement of urban services — water, electricity, telephone, transport infrastructure and road safety; the fight against poverty; the safeguarding of a balanced environment and the reduction of urban pollution; and the strengthening of international cooperation and of partnership between the State, the private construction sector, decentralized local authorities and non-governmental organizations.

Sectoral action is undertaken in a very complex context. With regard to housing, emphasis is placed on the need to guarantee secure land tenure; the revitalization and reactivation of national programmes for housing construction; assistance to people building their own houses through labour-intensive programmes; financing guarantees for housing for a greater number of people; and access to essential urban services.

With regard to social development and poverty eradication, we need to support efforts to enhance security and safety, particularly by giving victims of war, and youth in particular, an alternative to violence.

The development of community action and the involvement of local authorities in urban development constitute crucial priorities, and, in this framework, my country attaches considerable importance to the principle of gender equality, as set out in the basic law of the Congo.

With regard to the environment, its clean-up through the reduction of urban pollution, urban planning and the alignment of policies and actions will guarantee an environment conducive to the prevention of disasters, both health-related and related to urban growth.

Finally, we aim to strengthen small and micro-companies in order to stimulate job creation.

But given the challenges, the needs and the means available, it is clear that a lot remains to be done. However, the post-conflict programme which is currently being implemented over a period of three years demonstrates the desire of the authorities and of the people of the Congo to move from a crisis situation towards one of political and social stability, which has to precede development. This programme is now in its second year of implementation and has already enabled us to reinforce the peace-building process and to regain the trust of the people; to repair and rebuild basic infrastructures — roads, railways, ports, airports; to bring together bilateral and multilateral partners, primarily those within the United Nations system, to support the Congo; and to create conditions for implementing urgent activities to benefit as many people as possible, in particular those who were victims of the war, as well as young people, women and children. These programmes are being carried out in other areas in order to bring about the transition to development, particularly sustainable development.

I wish to conclude by launching an urgent appeal to the international community, particularly to the United Nations system, to provide substantial support to my country's efforts to eradicate urban poverty and to implement the interim post-conflict programme.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with the decision taken at the 1st plenary meeting, on 6 June 2001, I give the floor to Mr. Klaus Toepfer, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme.

Mr. Toepfer (United Nations Environment Programme): First of all I would like to extend my congratulations to the President of the General Assembly, Minister Holkeri, and to the members of the Bureau for the excellent leadership they have provided to this special session of the General Assembly.

I am fully aware, of course, of the outstanding importance of this special session of the General Assembly, five years after the City Summit in Istanbul, Habitat II.

There are at least three very good reasons for me, as Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and as Director-General of United Nations Office in Nairobi, to participate in this special session and to address this plenary meeting.

The first reason is simply that the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) and UNEP are both headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya, in Africa; we are the only two institutions of the United Nations family headquartered in that great continent and headquartered in the developing world.

We in Nairobi are all convinced that this location is a great asset. It is a challenge to prove that the development of human settlements in an environmentally sustainable manner is a precondition for sustainable development and for fighting poverty.

We are aware, too, that we must have open and constructive cooperation and that we can use effectively the synergistic advantages of our co-location, as was requested by the General Assembly in its important resolution 53/242, operative paragraph 9, on the report of the Secretary-General on environment and human settlements (A/53/463). In that resolution the General Assembly

> "*Reiterates* the importance of strengthening the capacity and capability of the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), within the framework of their existing mandates, in the areas of information, the monitoring and assessment of global and regional environmental and human settlements trends".

It is important to recall that the Assembly also stressed in this regard, in paragraph 11 of that resolution, "the need for adequate financial resources as well as the need to avoid duplication of efforts". It is my sincere hope that the outcome of these deliberations will also assist in achieving these objectives.

I can inform this meeting of the special session that we are committed to implementing these recommendations in building on the work that has already been done.

The second reason for my participation is that five years ago in Istanbul I had the chance to be the head of my country's delegation to the City Summit. I had the chance to learn a tremendous amount concerning the global situation, the expectations for human settlements and the urgent need to implement the Habitat Agenda. There was, especially in the developing world, the huge urbanization process, due, on one hand, to the population increase and, on the other hand, to the migration of people from the rural areas to the cities. This was motivated by the hope for a better life in the city, because those in rural areas were faced with fewer job opportunities and the lack of urban services such as electricity, clean water, sanitation, health and education.

This has resulted in the mushrooming of cities, and the social disaster of divided cities full of social tensions instead of cities with integrated functions and social groups, which in turn results in the rapid development of urbanization, the feminization of poverty, social tensions and environmental burdens with tremendous consequences for human health. Therefore, there is an urgent need for balanced development between the rural and urban areas. We must bring city and urban functions to the rural areas. Otherwise, the rural population will come to urban areas.

Not only is this a problem in developing countries, but more and more in cities in the developed world too. The need to overcome the divided nature of a city and to stimulate development to overcome poverty requires a legal basis for secure tenure and property rights such as those relating to home investment and micro-enterprise, the people-driven upgrading of slums and the need for microcredit that is mainly targeted at women, who also have to play a major role in city planning and development.

I learned in Istanbul that we must find ways to decrease the ecological footprints of cities and urban agglomerations that will increasingly burden the rural areas in their future development. We must review our efforts to make the population density of cities an opportunity to maximize ecological efficiency, which requires clear strategic decisions in city planning related to the management of transport and traffic, and therefore to reducing air pollution, as well as creating more effective approaches to waste and waste-water recycling.

Sustainable cities also require social integration. This is the challenge for local authorities, for decentralization, for the principle of subsidiarity. Mayors of cities and villages are directly linked to the needs and burdens of citizens. They are courageous enough to ensure transparent decision-making and to encourage the needed participation of their citizens. There must be ownership by the people living in urban settlements, who must be proud of their cities or villages in order to engender a cultural identity and social inclusion in their neighbourhoods. These are more important preconditions for safe cities linked to functional integration than is the availability of policemen or legal regulations.

There is an urgent need for the integration of all groups of civil society — the young and the old, families, especially women, professional planners and elected parliamentarians and, last but not least, private business — in the planning, management and running of the urban infrastructure of settlements.

This, among others, is the message I learned in Istanbul; a message even more important in the new millennium, with the Millennium Declaration asking for a world without slums. It was also a great privilege for me to be asked by the Secretary-General to be responsible for the revitalization process of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat). This two-year endeavour fully benefited from the support of Governments, through their permanent representatives, especially in Nairobi, but also here in New York, and was underpinned by the staff members of Habitat, as well as by a competent revitalization team. Therefore, it was a great pleasure for me last year to hand over the responsibility for Habitat to my good friend and colleague Anna Tibaijuka, totally in line with General Assembly resolution 53/242, which asks that those organizations have separate Executive Directors.

I want to congratulate Anna for her excellent work and for her friendship and to extend my best wishes for the great success of this special session here in New York, with the hope that it will provide a further impetus to the important tasks facing habitat for the future of humanity.

Finally, the third reason why I am here is that there are huge synergetic effects between our two respective mandates. I mentioned the Habitat Agenda; I mentioned General Assembly resolution 53/242; but I also have to mention Agenda 21 and, of course, its chapter 7 under the headline "Promoting sustainable human settlement development".

This is the basic precondition for our common dedication. This is the need for sustainable city development as a precondition for sustainable development overall. There is a need for the integrated provision of an environmentally sustainable structure of cities, sanitation, drainage and solid-waste management. There is the urgent need to promote sustainable energy and transportation systems, knowing that, at least in the developed world, one third and even more of all greenhouse gases are linked to transportation. We know the interrelation between poverty, shelter, environment and human health. There is a need for environmentally oriented city planning. I have mentioned only a few of the needs we have identified. Therefore, I believe that our cooperation in Nairobi between the Habitat Centre and the United Nations Environment Programme is most needed, too, in the preparatory work for the World Summit on Sustainable Development to be held in September next year in Johannesburg. I am looking forward to that good cooperation and to the outcome of that meeting.

The success of this special session will be a huge contribution to this process, as well as a tremendous signal of the commitment of Member States and civil society to addressing the challenges of human settlements in close cooperation with local authorities and in the framework of ensuring a sustainable future for our cities, for our villages, for all people in their shelter.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with the decision taken at the 1st plenary meeting, on 6 June 2001, I give the floor to Ms. Jan Peterson, President of Grassroots Organizations Operating Together in Sisterhood.

Ms. Peterson (Grassroots Organizations Operating Together in Sisterhood): I am proud to represent the Huairou Commission, which was actually born over the past five years, starting in Huairou, China, when Wally N'Dow had a vision for this Commission, and got its legs in Istanbul. So we think that, with all the struggles that many here have been having in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, for the past five years we are one of the successes of having started from an idea. We have built a global partnership coalition of networks that includes Grassroots Organizations Operating Together in Sisterhood International, the Habitat International Coalition Women and Shelter Network, the Women's Environment Development Organization, the International Council of Women, the Women for Peace Network and the Asia Women and Shelter Network. We now consist of more than 11,000 grass-roots women's groups and non-governmental organizations working together with local authorities, parliamentarians, development institutions and agencies.

At the heart of our approach is the mainstreaming of grassroots women's groups and poor communities in addressing habitat issues, such as shelter and basic services. In fact, while participants here have been going over some of the documents line by line, we have just come out of a five-day grass-roots women's international academy that started last Tuesday, where more than 75 women from the North, South and East got together to share good practices. We therefore feel very fortunate to have the Habitat Agenda be a place that actually gives real meat to the work that we know that grass-roots women are doing everywhere. Our focus has been on local governance, security of land tenure and post-disaster and -conflict reconstruction. We are about linking grass-roots women on the ground through pure learning, identifying best practices and facilitating grassroots women's exchanges and international academies so that grass-roots women can really build their capacity by learning from each other.

We now come from across 55 countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America, Eastern Europe, the European Union and North America. The Huairou Commission and its networks are at the centre of efforts to scale up the implementation of the Habitat Agenda through forging new community-State partnerships. In fact, we call our three-year strategic plan a "new way of partnering". We are doing local-to-local dialogues with local government, pure exchanges across countries and within countries and transfers of knowledge from good practices. These are key tools that we use to build capacities, reshape policies and transform communities and cities.

We believe that we have drawn lessons from community-driven initiatives to secure land, shelter

and basic services, build permanent housing and community-owned infrastructure and counter myths that are held by policy-makers. The first myth that we are countering is that grass-roots efforts are small scale. We know that grass-roots efforts are huge; there are all different sizes and shapes of grass-roots efforts. The problem they have had up until now is that they have not had a chance to link up and to build networks regionally and globally. The second myth is that grass-roots women's initiatives are necessarily low-tech. The third myth is that grass-roots women's groups are beneficiaries and not partners. As can be seen from the Slum Dwellers International housing display in the lobby of the General Assembly building, most of the innovations and practices are led by the poor. I would add a fourth myth that, if you focus on women, you are not strengthening the family. We know that women are at the heart of the family and that having strong women creates strong families.

Given that the majority of the settlements interventions that work for the poor are community-driven, we submit that grass-roots initiatives, in the context of poverty reduction and gender-equitable human settlements for all, are the mainstream. Resources and opportunities are needed to ensure that grass-roots women's groups and communities have an opportunity to publicly demonstrate the richness of their strategies and solutions so that they can become the basis for creating innovative, effective and sustainable ways of implementing the Habitat Agenda.

We are not only in a globalizing world; we are in a decentralizing world. Today, we are entering a new institutional context where there is increased potential for grass-roots women to scale up and upgrade their settlements development initiatives by partnering with local authorities and other public institutions. We have been pleased with the new direction of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat). We certainly are pleased that the first woman Executive Director, Anna Tibaijuka, has been appointed to that position. We are pleased with the new direction of the campaigns on local governance and secure tenure.

However, we are concerned that the Women and Habitat Programme at the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), the platform from which large numbers of women's groups could strengthen their capacities and contribute to the institutional process of mainstreaming gender-equitable settlement practices, has disappeared. Moreover, by rescinding the Women and Habitat Programme, we are concerned that we might have delinked institutional knowledge from interaction with the constituency that has produced these innovations in the field of settlements, because these programme changes carry the risk of marginalizing the efforts at the grass roots, the work of grass-roots women and communities. By these actions, we think that Governments are seriously losing the capacity to realize the opportunities to attain the full implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

Thus, we call for concrete measures that seek to transform public institutions and processes so that women and poor communities worldwide are seen at the centre of the transformation, fuelled by economic growth and resource investments in habitat and cities. This requires a strategic rethinking of the way we work. We need to view grass-roots women and communities as the problem-solvers in their communities, rather than as clients or beneficiaries. In redesigning policies, Governments need to recognize that grass-roots women's groups are the engines of development in their communities.

The only choice that Governments have is to exercise their commitment and show their political will. We learned, for example, about how two women from Mathari in Kenya met in the tent in Beijing. GROOTS Kenya now has 200 local groups that have, with very limited resources, formed a network. We have seen groups like the Mother Centres in Germany start with an idea that led to the setting up of 400 such centres in Germany and 105 in the Czech Republic, providing self-help services. We know that there is tremendous energy on the ground with grass-roots groups that are just looking for an opportunity to link up and find partners.

We call for urgent action by which Governments, the United Nations and multilateral agencies can facilitate the mainstreaming of grass-roots interventions and enhance sustainability and efficiency by taking the following actions. They can create institutional mechanisms for participation and negotiation — that is part of what we are beginning to do; we are considering how to look at those institutional mechanisms in local cities. They can establish decentralized financial mechanisms to mainstream and scale-up grass-roots initiatives to address habitat problems in cities — for example, we forged a church alliance with churches and religious groups in the United States who are going to create a

fund to work in partnership with grass-roots groups in Africa on the ground.

They can increase accountability through the recognition and empowerment of grass-roots women's groups in the planning and monitoring of public resources with local government. We have seen, in India and other places, how bringing women into power and building links with women in the community has enhanced the efficient functioning of those communities overall. Governments and intergovernmental organizations can extend policy support to grass-roots initiatives through information, credit and capacity-building. They can facilitate new community-based public and private partnerships to ensure optimum utilization through the piloting of efforts and scaling-up. We have successful groups; they mainly need to be scaled-up and networked. Each country represented here has many groups that are doing successful work. They need to be able to share their experiences with groups in other countries, build capacity, get the technical people out of the middle and let the people at the grass-roots level learn from each other.

We would like to conclude by stating that those recommendations are the key to the successful implementation of the Habitat Agenda, and that people would not be as depressed about the Habitat Agenda if they looked to the ground and saw the successes that are taking place there. We have come out of the first five years, and we are now launching local-to-local dialogues. We are looking to establish partnerships with local authorities in different countries to hold dialogues with grass-roots women's groups. We are continuing to identify good practices of women at the grass-roots level, and we do not want them just to be on a database; we want to make sure that the good practices actually become part of peer learning and grass-roots academies. We want to establish a commission on women to ensure that they are at the centre of disaster response, because we have found out from our groups in India and Turkey that when we include women in disaster response we get a three-fold return on the dollar — the women live in those houses and communities. That does not mean we do not want the men there.

We are going to continue our grass-roots academy, and we welcome partnership from the Governments and cities that really want to move towards this new vision.

The meeting rose at 1.25 p.m.